Boston Athenæum.
From the income of the fund given by
John Bromfield
of Boston, merchant. b. 1779 d. 1862
Received June 11, 1931.

EXTRACT FROM THE THIRTEENTH OF THE RULES FOR THE LIBRARY AND READING ROOM OF THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

"If any book shall be lost or injured, or if any notes, comments, or other matters shall be written, or in any manner inserted therein, the person to whom it stands charged shall replace it by a new volume, or set, if it belongs to a set."

5M APRIL, 1931

THE MISSING MONEY-LENDER

This story by a new writer is of the true detective type and will appeal to all who enjoy the fascination of pure deduction.

A doctor on a visit to a North country seaside resort, falls ill and is attended by a local practitioner. The doctor dies and his widow obtains a death certificate. On the same day a local money-lender disappears, leaving no trace. At first sight there is no connection between the two events, but the local inspector by clever deductions gets on the track of an ingenious crime.

The working out of the puzzle is absorbing and the solution will come as a surprise even to the medical profession.

But the technical details are absolutely accurate, for the author is himself a medical man.

THE MISSING MONEY-LENDER

BY

W. STANLEY SYKES

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

First published in 1931

Made and Printed in Great Britain by
Tonbridge Printers Peach Hall Works Tonbridge

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	THE DEATH OF DR. LAIDLAW	1
II	WHERE IS MR. LEVINSKY?	22
III	MR. TOMLIN PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT	67
IV	THE STOLEN ADDRESS BOOK	77
V	A DISCREPANCY IN THE TIME-TABLE	91
VI	THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD	118
VII	"THE POLICE HAVE MADE AN ARREST"	143
VIII	THE EXHUMATION	162
IX	A QUESTION OF IDENTITY	173
X	THE INQUEST	187
XI	THE OPINION OF THE FOURTH ESTATE	208
XII	THE PRISONER MAKES A STATEMENT	214
XIII	HOLM LEA AGAIN	231
XIV	THE POISON THAT IS NOT A POISON	249
XV	THE RE-EXAMINATION	268
XVI	AN ANALYTICAL LOOPHOLE	287
XVII	THE OFFICE BOY'S REVENGE	299
XVIII	THE THIRD ANALYSIS	306
XIX	THE BEGINNING OF THE END	319

THE MISSING MONEY-LENDER

THE MISSING MONEY-LENDER

CHAPTER I

THE DEATH OF DR. LAIDLAW

"THE other day one of my patients told me that he had applied for the job of public executioner," remarked Dr. James Osborne, settling himself more comfortably in his chair and lighting a much charred pipe with a demand note from the local rating authority.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the occupant of the other arm-chair. "What a brute the man must be!"

"Not at all. He is a model husband, a good patient and quite a respectable citizen in a humble way. He has three children and is very fond of them, and he wouldn't sell his dog for all the money in your bank."

"What on earth did he do it for, then?"

"Probably he wants a spare-time job—like your insurance work or my gardening. Or perhaps he just wants a change. Most people get fed up with their own work now and then. I think you ought to have a job like that, Woods,

instead of your insurance agency. It probably wouldn't be as profitable, but that doesn't matter much when it's a hobby—Art for Art's sake, you know. And just imagine how soothing it would be, after counting other people's money all day, to go and hang somebody before starting again next morning! Besides, you'd get about a bit more. Instead of sticking in this forsaken hole for forty-nine weeks every year and spending the other three at Scarborough you'd get to Pentonville and all sorts of thrilling places."

George Woods, bank manager and Borough Treasurer, was shocked to the depths of his conventional soul, for he was a staid and prosaic individual, as befitted his occupation. His habits were clock-like in their precision, and his ideas had crystallized into their final and unchangeable form many years before, which often caused him to be scandalized at the outrageous opinions of his irresponsible and eccentric friend—for friends they were in spite of, or perhaps because of, their differences.

Osborne was a born talker and debater, as casual and unbusiness-like as most doctors and less conventional than the majority. He wore plus fours and a soft collar even when visiting his best patients, regardless of the fact that Southbourne was rather a fashionable holiday

resort. He always insisted that he wore them simply because the other doctors in the town did not, and vowed that he had no use for patients who selected their doctor because of his "gents' superfine suitings." In actual fact he wore them because they were comfortable and because they released him from the thraldom of the trouser-press. He was of the opinion that the inventor of these garments was one of the great intellects of all time, and that the hallmark of true genius lay in the magnificent simplicity of the discovery that it was possible to abolish baggy knees for ever by making them baggy to begin with. So ran his argument. He had a moderate private income and, in the happy position of not being wholly dependent upon his profession, could afford to indulge his little eccentricities. Owing to the natural perversity of things in general he had a very good practice, although he made no attempt whatever to conciliate public opinion or the whims of his patients. Brusque, frank and almost brutally outspoken as he was, his patients loved him and came back for more. Many neurotics whom other medical men dared not offend for financial reasons had been reduced to tears and later restored to health by his plain-speaking.

Woods afforded a complete contrast to his

loquacious friend. He was a natural listener and regarded any new or unusual idea with grave suspicion. He had never even contemplated the possibility of going to his office in anything but a black coat and striped trousers, and waged constant warfare against the sartorial exuberance of the younger members of his staff. He was business-like in all things and always answered letters by return of post, whereas Osborne rarely answered them at all.

Osborne put his long legs up at an angle of forty-five degrees and added a few more scratches to the criss-cross pattern already engraved by his golf shoes on the painted marble of the mantelpiece.

"Did you know," he continued, "that one of the retired executioners has been publishing his reminiscences in the Sunday papers?"

"No, I did not. I never read them. I do not approve of Sunday work."

"Hear, hear! No more do I," replied Osborne, who had to work every Sunday himself. "Do you read the Monday morning papers, then?"

"Yes, of course."

"They're printed on Sunday, you know."

Mr. Woods abandoned this point and returned to the original one.

"They ought not to be allowed to publish horrible things like that," he said indignantly.

"Why not?" asked Osborne innocently.

Mr. Woods failed to perceive that he was being lured into one of their frequent arguments, in which he always had the worst of it.

"Why not?" he repeated in surprise. "Goodness knows I'm not a highbrow, but there ought to be a limit to the callousness of sensation-mongers."

Probably, in his heart of hearts, Osborne agreed with this very proper remark, but he was quite unable to resist the temptation to do a little argumentative leg-pulling.

"And why should a hangman's autobiography be less respectable than an admiral's?"

The bank manager, as he knew very well, was rather partial to this form of literature, which supplied him vicariously with the spice of adventure which was so conspicuously lacking in his own life.

"You are surely not trying to make out that distinguished soldiers and sailors are on the same footing as a hangman?"

"Well, is there any essential difference? Wash out sentiment, prejudice, social and financial differences and everything else that has raised the prestige of the profession of arms

and degraded the trade of hangman and come down to facts. They are both employed by the State, aren't they ? "

" Yes, O Socrates ! " replied Woods with elephantine humour.

" They both kill at the bidding of the State, don't they ? "

" Y—es," admitted Woods reluctantly, seeing his argument beginning to rock upon its foundations.

" And they are both under contract to kill any person whom they are ordered to kill without being allowed to use their own judgment as to whether he is worthy of death. That is decided for them in advance—in one case by the law courts, and in the other by the Cabinet. So they are all square so far. The only difference to my mind," continued Osborne, allowing his feet to fall off the mantelpiece as he warmed to his task, " is that the hangman only meets in his official capacity those who have been condemned to death after a careful and very expensive trial—in other words, those who can well be spared—whereas the soldier may have to kill men who are worthy and useful citizens. One up for the hangman ! "

Woods was silent for a moment. The logical arguments of his companion, even when they

were only half serious and directed to the defence of the most indefensible propositions, were always difficult to meet.

" But the man must be a mere brute without a spark of feeling or imagination—offering himself to kill in cold blood," was the best retort he could raise on the spur of the moment.

" He need not be worse than other people," came the ready reply. " Suppose you were one of those Italian chappies in the Middle Ages and hired an assassin cash down to knife your hated rival, wouldn't you be guilty of murder just as much as your employé ? You would. Very well, then. The hangman carries out the actual act, but he is morally no more responsible for the death of the criminal than the judge who pronounces the sentence, or the jury which returns the verdict. You take just as much part in every execution as he does because you, as a citizen, authorize him to do it. He is merely the instrument of the law, and the law is merely the will of the people. Uncomfortable thought, isn't it ? "

" Confound you, you are so beastly plausible ! I believe you could take over my job to-morrow and make people think you knew something about it ! "

" I should like to try," said Osborne medi-

tatively. "All I know about banking is that I would rather sign a cheque on the back than on the front. But there is one thing I could do rather well: I could stand behind the counter and throw the paid-in cheques over the partition beautifully! Seriously, though, I should like to change places with you for a time."

"I'd do the same cheerfully. I often think your job must be more exciting than mine."

"Exciting! It's about as dull as any professional work can be, besides being confoundedly inconvenient. You chaps do know what time you are going to finish your work. I don't. You have your week-ends free. I haven't. It must be perfectly topping to down tools at five o'clock and know there is nothing more to do till morning."

"What about the other side of it—the horrible monotony of having to be in your office at nine every day? You can, at any rate, start your work when you like and do it when you like. And then think of all the thrilling things that happen—accidents and cases of that sort."

"Accidents aren't thrilling. They are a damned nuisance. They come at the most inconvenient times, when you are very busy doing other work or having a meal or trying to snatch a game of golf. And then what good are you

when you get there? About as much use as a sick headache. The only thing that can be done by the roadside or in the neighbouring pub is first-aid—and that has always been done already by a policeman or somebody. Then you bung them off to hospital and miss all the interesting part of it. Now in your job there is always a sporting chance of somebody coming in and shooting up the place with a revolver and going off with the cash——"

"Pull yourself together, my dear man. We aren't living in Chicago. You talk as if bank robbers queued up every morning waiting for the doors to open."

"There is always the chance of somebody trying to pass a forged cheque or a dud banknote, anyhow."

"Well, don't you ever get people trying to swindle you?"

"Not in that way. I suppose a bit of malingering goes on in panel practice. Some people might spin out an illness in order to draw a few bob extra Lloyd George money, as they call it—after all, there are fifteen million insured persons, and they can't all be honest—but I do hardly any panel work and private patients have no inducement to try it on. Their speciality is trying to avoid paying their doctor's bills."

Osborne got up and rummaged about among the litter on the mantelpiece. After a few minutes he found the letter he was looking for and sat down again. He looked at it almost affectionately and read it through, though he knew its contents by heart.

"Talking of paying bills, or rather of not paying them, you have heard of the famous Aberdonian, I suppose?" he resumed.

"Heard of what?" said Woods abstractedly from behind the evening paper, which he had picked up when his host started reading.

"Whom, not what," corrected Osborne. "No, don't throw things about. I mean the man who took his wooden tee to the professional to be reshafted."

"Oh, yes, I know him."

"Here's a letter from one of his relations."

The bank manager caught the envelope thrown across to him and read the enclosure.

"Seems to have a grouse about something. What's it all about?"

"He is a patient of mine who is a confounded nuisance—not a Scotchman, by the way."

"Not really?" said Woods, turning the letter over and contemplating the neat signature, "Israel Levinsky," at the bottom of the page.

"He's owed me forty pounds for four years

and hasn't paid a penny yet. He must be fairly rich—I never heard of a money-lender who wasn't. At any rate, he lives in a very nice house and keeps an expensive car and a chauffeur. He'll nurse some potty little ailment for weeks and then send for me as urgently as if he'd broken his neck. I wish he would. I should make three guineas out of his inquest if he did, and that's more than I shall ever get out of him while he's alive! Unpleasant sort of chap to visit too. He's always grumbling and complaining and invariably seems to think it is my fault he is ill. I hate the very sight of him as a patient, though I believe he is rather a decent chap in other ways. I will say this for him—he doesn't call himself Griffith Jones or Angus Macalister, like most of them do. He doesn't even hide himself behind the name of a company. A Jew as a Jew is all right, but a Jew who pretends he is a Gentile is a nasty bit of work."

"Why do you attend him if you are so fed up with him?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose I have been too slack with him. I hate dunning people for money, but something will have to be done about this. He encloses my last two bills and deduces from the difference between them that he was charged ten and sixpence for the one

visit he had last quarter. Quite right too, and dirt cheap at the price. He called me out of bed at two o'clock in the morning in mid-winter and it would have done just as well next day, or next week for that matter. Well, you can tell how serious it was when he told me at the end of the visit that I needn't call again unless he sent for me. Can you imagine anyone having the cheek to write and complain about a bill that ought to have been paid long since? The fellow must have a hide like a rhinoceros. I'm going to settle him once and for all. I bet he doesn't give his creditors four years' grace."

Dr. Osborne took his fountain-pen from his pocket and a writing-pad from the top of the coal-box and relapsed into silence.

"How will this do?" he asked at length, signing his name with an emphasis that nearly drove the pen through the paper.

"SIR

You complain that you were charged half a guinea for a visit, and request details. Said details herewith. This very moderate fee was charged for services of at least three or four times that value. In the first place, the night call was quite unnecessary. Secondly, although the actual time spent at your house was short, a much-needed night's rest was completely

spoilt. Thirdly, in addition to my expenditure of time and loss of sleep there are my motoring expenses for nearly three miles. For this alone a taxi-driver would charge you as much at 2 a.m. Fourthly, you had the benefit of a professional man's ten years' experience and twenty years' expensive education, which you cannot expect to have for the price of unskilled labour. Finally, my books show that you have already had four years' medical attention for nothing. It therefore seems to me to be immaterial to you whether you are charged ten shillings or ten guineas a visit. If there are any details I have inadvertently omitted in this explanation they will be gladly furnished on request."

"Jove, that's a bit strong, isn't it?" ejaculated Woods. "Won't it do your practice a lot of harm?"

"Not it. I shall lose him as a patient of course, and a good job too, but he's not likely to tell anybody else about it. He won't broadcast the news that he's been turned down because he doesn't pay. This letter is going off to-night. Where's a stamp?"

Just as Osborne got up from his chair the bell rang. A few moments later footsteps came down the passage and a maid entered the room.

"A lady wants you to go to Holm Lea, Castle Road, sir."

"To-night?"

"Yes, sir. She said it was urgent."

"They all do. What sort of a case is it?"

"She didn't say, sir, except that it was a doctor who was ill."

"I'll go and see her in a moment."

"Very good, sir. I'll tell her."

The maid left the room and Osborne knocked out his pipe viciously.

"Doctor?" he said. "Don't know any doctors in Castle Road. What the devil does she want to come at this time for, anyway? Damn all patients!" He went out, still grumbling, and slammed the door behind him.

Woods smiled tolerantly. He had heard it all before on many occasions. Osborne invariably looked upon it as a personal insult if he was asked to go out in the evening, but he very rarely refused to go. In a few minutes he put his head round the door corner again.

"Sorry I have to go out, Woods. I shall be back in half an hour, so don't go unless you want to."

On the way to Castle Road the lady, Mrs. Laidlaw by name, told him that her husband had had an attack of influenza a few weeks previously, from which he had not recovered very well.

"He tried to start working again," she explained, "but he could not manage it. You see, we live in a manufacturing town and the practice is a very hard one. If it had been summer I think he could have managed, but the influenza epidemic was more than he could cope with, so I persuaded him to keep on the locum and come here for a rest. We took a furnished house for a month, and the first week seemed to do him a lot of good."

"When did he start being ill?" asked Osborne, whose irritation had now somewhat subsided.

"Yesterday morning. He began with a bad headache, but neither of us thought much about it at first. He thought his glasses might want altering—he wears glasses for reading—so he gave up reading and took some aspirins. They relieved the pain a bit; but he got worse and worse in himself and I got really frightened just before I came for you. He seemed very feverish and I couldn't get a sensible answer out of him at all. He didn't seem to know me."

Mrs. Laidlaw talked very rapidly and excitedly in a high-pitched rather metallic voice. Osborne was surprised to find that she was so emotional, because his first impression of her had been that of a very self-controlled woman. She had a

strong-featured face which would have been strikingly handsome if it had not been for her lips, which were too thin for beauty and which gave her an expression of latent cruelty and hardness. This was belied, however, by her evident concern for her husband. When they arrived at the house, which was within five minutes' walk, she took Osborne upstairs at once, only waiting for him to remove his coat in the hall. As they entered the bedroom a girl in housemaid's uniform got up from a chair by the fire.

"You can go now, Elsie," said Mrs. Laidlaw. "Don't go to bed though until we know whether there is any medicine to fetch."

The girl left the room and Osborne went up to the bedside. A single glance showed that the patient's wife had ample cause for anxiety. The man looked ill—very ill. He was lying on his side with his head thrown back to an unnatural angle, and his wide-open eyes roamed restlessly to and fro with an unseeing stare. His florid, bloated face proclaimed him to be a drinker, but a moment's examination showed that something more than mere drunkenness was present. As Osborne switched on the shaded bedlight he noticed that the pupils of the eyes were unequal. One of them was normal in size, the other was

widely dilated like that of a cat at night. He gave vent to a little noiseless whistle of professional interest and sat on the bed the better to examine the ominous inequality.

"I've brought the doctor to see you, dear," said Mrs. Laidlaw, leaning over and touching her husband lightly on the shoulder.

There was no answer.

"Speak to me, Harry," she whispered. Her voice had lost all its harshness and become softly and attractively tender. "He has been unconscious like that for two hours," she continued, turning to Osborne, who was unhooking his stethoscope from his braces.

The examination of the unconscious patient was interrupted by a violent attack of sickness, which drained all the colour from the unfortunate man's face and left it pale and damp. After this had passed off Osborne took a thermometer out of his pocket and was about to insert it under the tongue when Mrs. Laidlaw, who was watching anxiously, intervened.

"He has been grinding his teeth a good deal this evening, doctor. I tried to take his temperature and he nearly bit the thermometer in two."

"Thanks very much. In that case it must go under his arm." On removal it registered 104.4°.

"Your husband is very ill, I'm afraid," said Osborne seriously. "The temperature, the eyes, the position of the head and the sickness all point to meningitis."

"That's very dangerous, isn't it?"

"Yes. Of course he has a chance of recovery (a better one if he didn't booze so much," thought Osborne to himself). "Things are by no means hopeless, but it is undoubtedly dangerous. I think we ought to get a nurse in to-night and get a consultant to see him as soon as possible in the morning. I should like a second opinion on the case, not because there is any doubt about the diagnosis, but on account of the danger."

"I was a nurse before we were married, doctor, so I can manage for a day or two if you give me instructions."

Osborne discussed the treatment fully, promised to call again early in the morning and then returned to his fireside.

"Anything exciting?" queried Woods sleepily.

"Not a bit. Interesting from a medical point of view, because there were signs of meningitis with normal knee-jerks and abdominal reflexes, if you know what they are. But thrilling, no."

"I do not know what abdominal reflexes are, and I do not want to know," replied the Borough

Treasurer with fictitious austerity. "They sound disgusting and it is time to go to bed."

Twelve hours later Dr. Laidlaw was slightly better and the idea of obtaining a further opinion was abandoned.

A second visit in the evening found the improvement maintained and Osborne began to be a little more hopeful, though he still thought there was great danger, and said as much to the patient's wife.

"You really must get a nurse to-morrow," was his parting injunction. "Nobody can work twenty-four hours a day, even for their husbands."

Mrs. Laidlaw looked exhausted with worry and want of sleep. She said that she had been up for two days and two nights, and she certainly looked like it. Her beautiful grey eyes had dark shadows beneath them and her face was drawn and white. She gave a definite promise to get the nurse.

But, as it happened, its fulfilment was not necessary. Early next morning she was the first arrival at the doctor's.

"What's the matter? Is he worse?" asked Osborne, somewhat startled by her appearance.

"He died at eight o'clock this morning," she sobbed, sinking down into the consulting-room

chair and burying her face in her handkerchief.

"I am very sorry indeed to hear it," he replied awkwardly. Like most medical men he could never overcome a feeling of embarrassment and professional disappointment on these occasions in spite of their frequency. "I don't think it would have made any difference if we had had further advice," he continued. "It was a severe attack and the risk was very considerable right from the beginning."

"I know. Please don't think that I am dissatisfied in any way, doctor. I am sure you did everything that could be done for him, and I am very grateful to you. He had rather a quieter night and then got worse suddenly about half-past six. That awful sickness came on again, and this time it seemed to be too much for his heart and his pulse got weaker and stopped. I hadn't time to send for you until it was too late, it all happened so quickly; and then, when he was dead, I knew it was no good bothering you during breakfast-time."

Osborne mentally blessed the good sense of the woman, which stood out in sharp contrast to the occasional idiots who woke him up in the middle of the night to inform him that an expected death had taken place. He murmured

a few words of sympathy as he took the death certificate book out of its drawer and began to fill in the details.

This formality completed, the newly made widow departed with her copy and he turned his attention to the demands of the living, who were beginning to accumulate in the waiting-room.

CHAPTER II

WHERE IS MR. LEVINSKY ?

MR. ROSENBAUM, clerk to the firm of Levinsky & Co., Financiers, halted at the top of the second flight of steps in Union Bank Chambers, pinched off the lighted end of his cigarette and stowed the remainder carefully away for future use. From another pocket he took his latch-key and opened the door of the office where he spent most of his waking hours. As he entered he looked through the window at the Town Hall clock, which stood at five minutes to nine, and then he took off his somewhat seedy coat and replaced it by a still seedier one, polished to extreme shininess by years of friction. He next fetched the letters and arranged them in a neat pile on the table.

This was his invariable routine—the after-breakfast cigarette was always half-finished when he arrived, he inevitably looked at the Town Hall clock directly he entered, although

he knew perfectly well it was five minutes to nine, and he never took out the letters before changing his coat. In all things he was a creature of habit ; consequently he was still a clerk after thirty years' service.

He uncovered the typewriter and began his day's work with the slow and dignified touch of one whose employer has not yet arrived. When he had typed about half a page he heard footsteps coming up the stairs and the rattling of the keys increased in speed and then stopped suddenly as the bell rang. He got up and opened the door.

"Is Mr. Levinsky in ?" asked the man standing outside.

"Not yet," said Mr. Rosenbaum. "But he will be here in a minute or two. Will you come in and wait ?"

The visitor came in and sat down and the clerk went on with his work. The clicking of the typewriter was very intermittent, because its operator kept stopping to turn round and consult the clock. Really it was very extraordinary, and Mr. Rosenbaum could not understand it at all. When he told the man at the door that his employer would be only a few minutes he believed it with the same unquestioning faith that he believed the sun would rise in

the morning. Mr. Levinsky was a man who made a fetish of punctuality, priding himself on never missing a meal or an appointment, and he had never been known to be late or away from the office without due notice.

A quarter past nine chimed and the waiting client became restive. He had a hard and uncomfortable chair to sit on and there was nothing to read within reach except the "Stock Exchange Handbook" for 1907. Dirty yellow distemper on the walls and threadbare linoleum on the floor, assisted by the barren hideousness of thirty-year-old office furniture, absorbed most of the feeble rays of spring sunlight which contrived to filter through the smeared and streaky windows. It was a dispiriting environment for a man who was already sufficiently depressed. Not many people visit a money-lender's office in a joyful, care-free frame of mind, and this particular client was no exception to the general rule.

"Hey, young man," he said at length, "I thought you said your boss would be here by now?"

Mr. Rosenbaum looked worried.

"So he ought to be," he replied. "He always comes at nine, and he's never been as late as this before."

"He told me to come at nine and said he'd have the money ready. Can't you let me have it? I don't want to wait here all day."

"I can't possibly. I haven't got the key of the safe."

The little clerk, who feared responsibility almost as much as he feared physical pain, would never have dared to hand over the money in any case, but was pleased to have a good excuse. At this point another prospective borrower arrived for his promised loan and was also persuaded to wait. Rosenbaum fussed about in a paroxysm of indecision, made worse by the fact that he had nothing to do. He had finished his typing—arrears of work from the previous day—and could do nothing for the borrowers. His usual routine was to begin with the replies to the morning's letters, but even this was denied him in the absence of his employer.

He went backwards and forwards from the door to the window, but there was no sign of Mr. Levinsky in either direction. The Town Hall clock chimed a quarter to ten, and Mr. Rosenbaum made up his mind to telephone for information or instructions. It was with some hesitation that he made even this decision, because he knew that the head of the firm made

it a rule never to transact business of any kind at home.

"Hallo. Can I speak to Mr. Levinsky?" he said to the answering voice.

"I don't think he will be in, but if you wait a minute I'll go and see."

He waited several minutes, and then the same voice spoke again:

"He isn't in, Mr. Rosenbaum."

"Not in? Then, where is he?"

"At the office, I should think."

"Of course he isn't. What do you think I'm ringing up for?"

"It's very funny. I'll go and have another look. He wasn't downstairs and there was no answer when I knocked at his door, but I'll look in the bedroom this time. He may be ill."

Another wait, and the housemaid again replied.

"There's nobody there and the bed hasn't been slept in. And the breakfast tray is still just where I put it, and it hasn't been touched. Whatever's happened, Mr. Rosenbaum?"

"I know nothing about it, except that he hasn't turned up, nor sent any message. I'll wait for him a bit longer and telephone again if he doesn't come."

The clerk rang off, astounded at this unexpected news. It was so completely at variance

with the habits of a lifetime that he was seriously alarmed and resolved to wait no longer. He took up the receiver again and asked for the police station, regardless of the fact that one of the waiting clients melted silently away as he did so. This in itself showed his extreme agitation, for in addition to his salary he received a microscopic commission on business done, and a prospective borrower never escaped empty-handed without being buttonholed by Mr. Rosenbaum.

The policeman at the other end of the wire was also startled out of his official calm by the story, but for different reasons. That the station should be informed merely because a business man was late at his office seemed to him to savour of a practical joke, but the earnest entreaties from the money-lender's clerk finally induced him to switch the call through to his superior.

Inspector Ridley was not at all impressed by what he heard until the untouched bed and breakfast were mentioned. These, combined with the emphasis laid on the missing man's clock-work habits, appeared to rouse his interest, and he consented to come round to the office in person.

Ten minutes later he arrived, half expecting

that his time was being wasted. He found, however, that the office was still occupied only by the clerk and the one remaining client, whose business was apparently as urgent as his conscience was clear.

"No more news yet?" asked the inspector.

"No, inspector."

"You don't know of any reason why Mr. Levinsky hasn't come?"

"None at all. I've never known it happen before, and I've been with him for thirty years. If he had known he was going to be late he would have let me know. He always did."

"Perhaps he has been called away suddenly on business," said Ridley, half to himself, thinking at the same time that he ought to have made this inquiry before leaving the station.

"He wasn't the sort of man to do that without preparations. When he went away he always told me beforehand for business reasons."

Ridley thought for a moment. He did not want to appear melodramatic, but the prosaic possibilities of the situation were well-nigh exhausted, so after slight hesitation he continued his catechism:

"Has he received any threatening letters lately?"

"Well, hardly that. He has had one or two

abusive ones, but that's not altogether unusual. Money-lenders aren't always popular with their business customers, you know, although I must say our firm is pretty reasonable, considering the risk we take. Anyway, we've only been taken to court once on a plea of a harsh and unconscionable bargain, and we won our case. The only letter out of the ordinary is one we received a few days ago from a local doctor. I can show you that."

Rosenbaum went to a filing cabinet and came back with the letter which Dr. Osborne had written. The inspector read it and smiled.

"Did Dr. Osborne owe your firm any money?"

"No. He was Mr. Levinsky's doctor, and the boot was on the other leg according to this. I'm pretty certain the doctor didn't borrow from us."

"Has the firm been losing money lately?"

"Not that I know of. Of course Mr. Levinsky keeps his private books in the safe, and I really couldn't say for certain. I only deal with customer's accounts. But business has been quite good, and he hasn't seemed at all worried."

The inspector made a mental note to inquire into the financial state of the firm, if the case came to anything, and also to go through the letter files for evidence of threats. These two

reasons appeared to him to be the most likely causes of a sudden disappearance.

"Did the office look quite normal this morning?" was his next question.

"Just as usual," replied the clerk. "There was nothing disarranged or out of place at all. Stop a minute, though. There was one thing which I noticed, but I don't suppose it is anything important."

"Doesn't matter whether you thought it was important or not," interrupted Ridley. "What was it?"

"That door was unfastened." He pointed to the private office which led out of the room in which they stood. "The boss is always very careful to lock it before he goes home, but he must have forgotten it last night."

"He was here yesterday, then?"

"Yes. He left at his usual time—half-past four."

"Did you notice that he had left the door unlocked?"

"Not at the time. I heard him and the charwoman come out, but I didn't take any particular notice. You see, he insists on keeping his private room locked when he is not in, and he never gives the key to anybody else, so it has to be dusted when he is there. The charwoman generally comes late in the afternoon when he has finished the more important work."

"You haven't a key, then?"

"No, not for this door. Only for the outer one."

The inspector went to the door and examined the lock. It did not appear to have been damaged or tampered with in any way, so he opened it and went in, followed by Mr. Rosenbaum.

The money-lender's private office was a pleasant room, comfortably furnished, and it seemed luxurious in comparison with the antechamber occupied by the clerk. There was a flat-topped desk facing the fire-place with a revolving arm-chair in front of it, another arm-chair by its side, a filing cabinet opposite the door and a very large safe let into the wall. By the side of the safe was a tin of metal polish and some cleaning rags. The floor was carpeted and the electric light subdued by a large and expensive alabaster bowl. Evidently Mr. Levinsky liked to work among comfortable surroundings.

Ridley turned to his companion as soon as he saw the cleaning rags.

"Is the charwoman available?"

"I should think so. She seems to spend most of her time in the building. She will probably

be in one of the other offices. I'll go and get her if you like."

He went out on his errand and the inspector made a general survey of the room. First he went to the safe, and noticed that the door was shut and apparently locked. The handles and fittings were of bright brass, the body of the safe painted dull green, and it formed a handsome and imposing piece of furniture. He was about to try the knob when a sudden thought struck him and he refrained. Bending forward he looked at the glittering metal intently. There on its surface was a distinct finger-print, showing quite plainly without the aid of dusting powder.

"Good job I didn't touch it," he said to himself. "I don't suppose it is anything important, but you never know. It can't be of any value, surely," he continued. "This is not a case of burglary, and anyhow it was probably left by the charwoman when she was cleaning."

In spite of these arguments, however, he did not touch the knob. He had long since learnt not to condemn anything as worthless on theoretical grounds. At this moment the clerk came back with the charwoman, a corpulent lady with a figure like an imperfectly filled sack of flour and a habit of wiping her hands on the piece of G.P.O. sacking which served her for an apron.

"This is Mrs. Kenrick, inspector. She cleans all these offices."

Ridley devoted a few minutes to explaining to the flustered woman that he only wanted to ask her a few questions, and succeeded in convincing her that she was not going to be arrested. Experience had taught him that it saved time and temper in dealing with people of this type.

"Now, Mrs. Kenrick," he said, "you cleaned this office yesterday, I think?"

"Yes, I did," she replied in a bellicose tone. "And I don't see why you want to find fault with it."

"I'm not finding fault," he soothed. "I only want to know a few details. Did you clean this knob as well?"

"Yes, sir, and I'd like to know who's been putting their dirty fingers on it."

"So would I," commented Ridley. "You don't think you left that mark there by any chance?"

"What, just after I'd cleaned it? No fear!"

Mrs. Kenrick stepped forward and picked up her polishing rages with the evident intention of making a further onslaught on the offending knob there and then, but the inspector stopped her just in time.

"Not now, please. We may want it. What

happened yesterday, Mrs. Kenrick, when you were in this room ? "

" I came in here about three o'clock, sir, and washed the windows first of all, Inside, of course. The outsides is done by the window-cleaners, and they come once a fortnight, and what with taking all the hot water they are more bother than they are worth. And that boy of theirs is that cheeky——"

" What was Mr. Levinsky doing while you were doing this ? "

" He was writing at the desk. He did a lot of writing. He always seemed to be doing it whenever I came in. It beats me what he found to write about, but then I'm no scholar, nor never was. I left school when I was nine, I did——"

Further reminiscences of Mrs. Kenrick's infancy were cut short.

" What did you do next ? "

" Lor', inspector, you do take me up sharp. I was telling you what I was doing. I washed the oilcloth next and dusted round the room, and then I gives them brasses a rub with Shino and was just polishing them when he got up to go, all in a hurry like, and I had to go too. He never lets me stop to finish anything. If it isn't done when he wants to go it has to wait till next day. Dirty 'abit, I calls it."

" You actually saw him leave, then ? "

" I did that. I went out of the door with me bucket and floor-cloth and didn't have no time to go back for them polishing rags, and he came straight out after me so quick that he nearly shut the floor-cloth in the door."

" Did he lock it ? "

" Yes. Catch him forgetting a thing like that ! "

" Are you sure of that ? "

" Certain."

Ridley was by now thoroughly interested. This latest discovery meant one of two things. Either the owner of the office had come back again, reopened the door and forgotten to lock it, which was improbable in a person of his orderly and methodical habits, or some other person had paid an unauthorized visit to the room since he left. If so, the finger-print on the knob of the safe might be valuable.

" Phone to the police station," he said to Rosenbaum, " and ask them to get hold of a photographer and bring him along here straight away. Tell them it is for finger-prints."

He realized that he was drawing a bow at a venture. The marks might have been made by Mrs. Kenrick when she was cleaning the brass-work, in spite of her denials, which could easily

be ascertained by taking prints of her hands and comparing them. They might also have been made by the owner of the safe on his lawful occasions, but in his absence Ridley did not see how this could be proved or disproved, unless by chance the prints could be identified by Scotland Yard as belonging to some one known to the police. It was obvious, however, that no matter what happened in the future it was essential to get a permanent record of them at once.

Meanwhile he returned to the interrogation of the charwoman, with special reference to the problem of whether the owner of the office had returned to it after he left. Mrs. Kenrick had by now quite recovered from her nervousness and was thrilled with the anticipation of an evening's gossip, with herself as the heroine of the story. The extraction of information was easy; it flowed from her in irrelevant verbosity on the slightest provocation. The difficulty was to stem the torrent and keep her to the point.

"What time did you leave here?"

"Half-past four. I noticed that because I looked at the clock. You can see the Town Hall nicely from this window, though me sight isn't as good as it was; and I'm not one of those who are always watching the clock, anyway. But

I wanted to see if there was time to do any more work or whether it was time to go home."

"Oh, and did you go home?"

"No, sir; I went across to Hetherington's office."

"That is the firm who have the rooms on the other side of the landing," interposed Mr. Rosenbaum, who had returned from the telephone.

Ridley at once asked to see these rooms, whereupon the three crossed the clerk's office and went out.

"Now, tell me exactly what you did when you got here."

Mrs. Kenrick opened Hetherington's door with a flourish.

"All I did was to scrub the floor in this passage. It has to be done twice a week because there's always such a lot of folks going in and out."

"Did you have the door open all the time?"

"Yes, sir; there isn't enough light if you don't. They keep all these office doors shut and expect me to get the passage clean whether I can see or not. I'd like some of them there young hussies who work them trypewriter things to scrub it for a bit. With their silk stockings and their bobbed 'air." Mrs. Kenrick sniffed

loudly and then, as an additional precaution, wiped her nose on her apron.

"How long were you there?"

"Till it was time to stop work."

"Yes, yes; but what time was that?"

The charwoman looked at the inspector with a pitying smile.

"Five o'clock," she condescended to reply.

"We know, then, that you saw Mr. Levinsky leave his private office. Did you see him leave his offices altogether?"

"Yes. I saw him speak to Mr. Rosenbaum here and then go straight downstairs."

"Quite right," agreed that gentleman. "And I left about five minutes afterwards."

"Now, listen, Mrs. Kenrick—this is important—when you were across in these offices with the door open you could see or hear anybody who got into or tried to get into Levinsky's, couldn't you?"

"Ay, I could have done if anybody had done, but I didn't see nobody nor nothing."

The inspector ploughed his way through this sea of negatives and arrived at its true meaning. This proved that the missing man had not returned to his office up to 5 p.m., at any rate.

At that moment steps were heard coming up the stairs and a plain clothes sergeant, accompanied by a photographer, arrived. Ridley instructed them to photograph the finger-prints he had found, and also to persuade Mrs. Kenrick to have her prints taken. He then made a note of her address, ejected the disappointed borrower and left the men in charge of the office.

"Come round with me to his house," he said to the clerk. "How long has he been in Southbourne, by the way?"

"He came to live here about five years ago, and opened this office then. He brought me with him when he sold his Bradford business."

"Why did he do that?"

"What? Bring me with him? I suppose he didn't want to get another clerk who knew nothing about the business."

"No. I mean why did he sell it?"

"Well, I think—though, mind you, he would never admit it—that he had made as much money as he wanted, and he simply started this new concern in order to have something to do."

On arrival at Croft Villa there was no need to ring the bell. The front door opened as they were approaching it and an apprehensive housemaid admitted them. It was obvious from her expression that her master had not yet turned up, and Ridley plunged straight away into the

task of following up the information received from the charwoman.

"What time did Mr. Levinsky get home last night?" he asked.

"Just before five o'clock, sir."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he always gets in at that time and I should have noticed it if he hadn't. He has tea at five, and it has to be punctual or there is an awful fuss about it."

"Rather late, isn't it?"

"Well, it isn't afternoon tea, sir. He calls it high tea, and he doesn't have dinner in the evening." The maid, who was South Country born and bred, was slightly supercilious. "He lived in Yorkshire most of his life," she added in extenuation, "and he often used to say that he liked Yorkshire ways best."

"What did he do after tea?"

"He stayed in all the evening, sir. I took his supper into the dining-room at nine, and he was there till ten to my certain knowledge."

"What happened then?"

"I went to bed at ten, so I don't know. I was asleep in a few minutes."

"I see. Thanks very much. Now, what about the cook? I should like to ask her a few questions if she is anywhere about."

The cook appeared round the door corner with suspicious suddenness and then tried to look as if her presence was purely coincidental.

"Do you know what your master did last night?" said Ridley, concealing his amusement.

"Well, sir, I'm not such a good sleeper as Edith," she began. It was evident that she had not missed much of Edith's interview. "I heard the front door bell ring soon after ten, and then a bit later the car went out of the garage."

"Did you hear it come back again?"

"No, sir."

"Do you happen to know who rang the bell?"

"No, sir. My bedroom is a long way from the door and I can only just hear it."

The money-lender's bedroom was next visited, but yielded nothing of interest. The bed had not been disturbed in any way. The pyjamas were laid out, and a pair of slippers placed by the bedside. Ridley turned back the clothes and found a stone-cold rubber bottle still there. He crossed over to the side window and looked out. The room overlooked the garage and the tennis lawn, and almost directly below the window the chauffeur was cleaning the car under a glass-roofed washing shed. The swish of water from the hosepipe and the clumping of

his heavy washing clogs could be heard distinctly even through the glass. Ridley looked down at the two-seater with some interest. As far as his information went it had been taken out, presumably by its owner, shortly after he was last seen, so it promised to be a suitable field for investigation. He left the house and went across to the shed.

"Good morning, sir. Needs cleaning, doesn't she?" said the chauffeur, touching his cap.

Ridley nodded. The bodywork was muddy and the tyres and mudguards badly splashed with tar, which the man was endeavouring to remove with a patent cleaner.

"Was it messed up like this yesterday?"

"No, sir. I left it clean when I went home. It must have been out during the evening."

"Have you any idea where it went?"

"Not the slightest. Mr. Levinsky often drives it himself. More often than I do, to tell you the truth. I clean it and oil it and do odd jobs about the house and garden, but I don't do much driving. I hope nothing serious has happened to him, sir."

"Don't know yet," said the inspector shortly, opening the off-side door and glancing at the trip speedometer. It registered three miles and two-tenths.

The chauffeur nodded his head approvingly. "That will tell you how far he went, sir, because I reset it to zero myself yesterday afternoon when I was polishing the dashboard. But it won't tell you where he went, and more's the pity. Still, I don't see that it matters. Wherever he went he came back here again."

Ridley remained silent. His more critical mind, trained by police and court procedure to differentiate between facts and assumptions, perceived the fallacy in the other's statement. The fact that the car had come back did not necessarily prove that its owner had returned. Neither did he dismiss the speedometer so lightly as a useless clue. He went back to the house and took up the telephone receiver, which was in the dining-room, and gave the number of the Town Hall, which had a private branch exchange.

"Hallo. Put me through to the Borough Engineer's office, please. . . . Is that Mr. Holland? Inspector Ridley speaking. I want to know whereabouts you were tarring roads yesterday. Yes, I'll hold the wire. . . . What's that? Four different places. Yes, I can hear you. I want the names of the streets. Burley Road, Marlton Avenue, top end of Castle Road and . . . what was the last one? Oh, Parkside

Place. Thanks very much. Quite certain there were no others? Right. No, it's nothing to do with any of your men."

"That's lucky," he thought as he rang off. "We can wash out three of these places at once. They are all at the other end of the town and more than two miles away. Castle Road is about the right distance, though, so we might be able to find out where he went after all. Anyhow we know he did not go back to the office between half-past four and ten. The charwoman and the maids are quite definite about that. It isn't likely that he went after ten. The office is nearly three miles away, so he didn't go in the car, unless he reset the speedometer, and there is no reason why he should walk when he had the car handy. And if he didn't go somebody else did. I hope that finger-print turns up trumps."

Ridley went back to the chauffeur, who was still trying to remove the tar-stains.

"I want you to take me out in this car," he said. "I will take full responsibility for borrowing it."

"Right you are, sir," replied the man cheerfully, kicking off his washing clogs.

"Put that speedometer back to zero, then, and drive to Castle Road."

The man obeyed in mystified silence and drove off. It added to his bewilderment to see that his passenger was taking no interest in his surroundings, but was leaning forward with his eyes fixed on the dashboard. The car turned into Castle Road, and about a quarter of a mile further on Ridley heard what he was waiting for—the spattering of granite chips on the mudguards.

"Slow down," he directed, without raising his eyes.

The chauffeur changed into second and the car crawled along another hundred yards.

"Stop," was the next order, as the speedometer figures clicked from one mile and five-tenths to one mile and six-tenths.

"Now," thought the inspector, "this ought to be the place. It is the right distance, allowing for the return journey, and the tar-spraying makes it nearly a certainty."

Castle Road was a newly developed residential district on the outskirts of Southbourne. It still contained a goodly number of vacant plots filled with nettles and notice boards, but at the point where the car stopped there was a row of houses called Wingrave Terrace on one side of the road, and two or three "desirable semi-detached residences" on the other. The whole area had

an air of raw newness. Blatant red tiles and glaring white stucco proclaimed its infancy as plainly as the sharp unweathered edges of the bricks and the intact state of the shoddy mortar. Heaps of builders' materials and rubbish still cumbered the ground and formed pitfalls for the unwary, and the general impression left upon the beholder's mind was that Castle Road would be a good place to live in fifty years hence, when it had matured.

Ridley got out of the car and walked slowly round it, looking at each of the tyres in turn. He noted that three of them were Dunlops, and the fourth a Michelin, of the older high-pressure type. He then told the driver to go to the nearest post office and borrow the voters' list. While the man was away he filled in the time by searching the gaps between the houses, but could find no traces of the tyre marks he was looking for. This disproved nothing; if the car had been here the night before it might very well have been parked in the road.

The chauffeur returned with the list and took him back to the house, where Rosenbaum was waiting anxiously. There was still no news. Ridley telephoned to the station while the cook was preparing a hurried lunch and ordered a constable to be sent to make inquiries at Wingrave

Terrace and at the houses opposite. Also the constable on duty in the charge room was to ring up all the hospitals in the district and the local station-master in addition.

After the meal Ridley and the clerk returned to the office. The former picked out from the voters' list the names of the inhabitants of the houses in Castle Road, while the latter looked up each of them in his ledgers. None of them had ever dealt with the firm, as far as he could ascertain, but he admitted that this was not absolutely conclusive because the names of the borrowers did not all pass through his hands.

This done, the inspector walked back to the Town Hall. He found that the man in the charge room had nearly finished his task. None of the local hospitals had admitted any unidentified accident or loss of memory cases during the last twenty-four hours, and a few minutes after Ridley entered the station-master rang up and reported that Mr. Levinsky had not been seen by any of the ticket collectors, booking clerks or porters, many of whom knew him by sight. An hour later the constable returned from Castle Road and went to the inspector's office immediately, according to his orders.

"All quite straightforward, Roberts?" queried

Ridley. "Were they speaking the truth, or was there anything fishy about any of them?"

Ten out of the eleven visits, it appeared, were absolutely straightforward, a simple question meeting with an equally simple negative answer. The eleventh house was the only one which aroused any interest whatever.

"All the blinds were down at this place, sir," explained Roberts. "And the door was opened by a lady who seemed to be very upset. She had dark rings round her eyes and her hair was all untidy, and she looked as if she had been crying. I told her that I was making inquiries about Mr. Levinsky, who was thought to have been somewhere in the neighbourhood about 10 p.m. yesterday——"

"Go on, man. I know all that. You're not in the witness-box now. What happened?"

"She stared at me, sir, as if she'd seen a ghost, and fainted without saying a word. Just collapsed all in a heap on the front door mat. Well, I picked her up and carried her into the first room I came to and put her down on the couch. I then rang the bell hard and knocked, but nobody came, so I went into the kitchen. There wasn't anybody there, so I got a glass of water and took it back to the room. She was still unconscious, so I ran upstairs and looked

round to try and find somebody, but she was alone in the house except for a corpse in the front bedroom."

"Wasn't old Levinsky, by any chance?" said the inspector with a smile.

"Not a bit like him, sir. I know him well, and this was a younger man. He had black hair instead of grey and was clean-shaven. Mr. Levinsky had a short beard. Besides, it wasn't lying in a pool of blood or anything dramatic like that. It was a very respectable corpse, laid out in a very respectable bed, with blinds down and everything——"

Ridley cut his literal-minded subordinate short and requested him to confine himself to details that mattered.

"When I went downstairs again I found that the lady had recovered, and she told me that her husband had died from meningitis early this morning. She apologized for making an exhibition of herself, but she said she was feeling worn out with the strain and worry of it all, and a policeman coming to the door was the last straw."

"That's all very well," admitted the inspector. "But I don't see why she should faint. Now, if her husband had been in hospital when you came to the door it would have been reasonable

enough, because you might have been bringing bad news, but if he was already dead—— I don't like it, Roberts. It sounds all wrong. Did you notice anything else about her or the house ? "

" Nothing unusual, sir."

" What name was it ? "

" Laidlaw. She told me that the dead man was a doctor and that they had come here for his health."

" Well, it may be all right, but it takes a deuce of a lot to make a twentieth-century woman faint. Of course it's not much to go upon, but still, taken together with the speedometer business, it wants looking into. After all, Levinsky probably was there or thereabouts last night. Go back and keep an eye on her. No, send Jones instead. She knows you by sight. Tell him to see what she does and report to me direct."

Ridley turned his attention to his routine work and was still dealing with his neglected morning mail when, twenty minutes later, the telephone bell rang and the watcher informed him that Mrs. Laidlaw had just posted a letter in the pillar-box outside her gate.

" Find out what time the next collection is," was the reply. " I'll hold the line. What's that ?

Not for three and a half hours yet ? That's a pity. Oh, all right. Good-bye. Stop a minute, though. How far away were you when she posted it ? Thirty yards ? H'm ; too far off to see the envelope, then."

Ridley rang off and returned to his desk, where he sat for several minutes staring into the fire-place with a frown of perplexity. Suddenly he got up and gave a quick, decided ring at the bell.

" Send Purley in here," he ordered the answering constable.

" Come in and shut the door," he said when Detective Officer Purley arrived. " You've got to keep your mouth shut about this," he went on, " or you'll get me hanged. I'm going to do something illegal. I want to know more about that Mrs. Laidlaw and I'm going to listen-in to a letter she's written. I shall have to bamboozle the postmaster a bit, and that's where you can help."

Purley registered surprise. " Can't you get a warrant, sir," he asked, " and do it in a regular way ? "

" No. I really haven't anything to go upon, and it seems to be a dashed sight harder to get permission to open a letter than to get a warrant for the arrest of the person who wrote it. 'Tisn't wartime now, you know."

"The postmaster won't give it to you, sir. It'd be as much as his place is worth."

"No, he won't give it to me, and I can't make him, but he might let me have a look at the envelope—as a favour. I know him pretty well, you know."

"Oh, he'll do that all right, sir. I suppose you want to find out who she's been writing to?"

"Yes, and what she has to say as well."

"He won't let you open it, sir."

"I know."

"Then what's the good——?"

"Ever been to a spiritualistic séance?" interrupted the inspector.

"No, sir." Purley looked more mystified than ever.

"I have, and I saw the medium do something very useful. You could write any sentence you liked on a piece of paper, seal it up in an envelope and give it to him. He held it under the table—the lights were on all the time—and then gave it back to you with the seals unbroken and told you what you had written."

"Special kind of ink," suggested the sceptical Purley.

"Not at all. I had two goes at it. The first time I used my own fountain pen, and the second time my own pencil. It didn't make any difference. He was right each time—every word correct."

"Some hanky-panky with the sealing-wax?"

"No, it wasn't that. I sealed it with my own latch-key and wrote my initials across all the joints of the envelope. He only had it for two minutes at the most and hadn't time to open it and reseal it. Besides, he hadn't the chance. He held it under the table with one hand and kept the other one in sight most of the time. The initials were untouched and the envelope had certainly never been opened. It was given back to me in the same condition as it was when I handed it to him."

Purley was by this time rather anxious. He had never heard Ridley talk like this before and began to wonder if he was ill. What on earth was all this talk about spiritualistic séances from the lips of a staunch Nonconformist? Unobtrusively he sniffed, but even his experienced nose could not detect the smell of alcohol. Anyhow, he knew the inspector to be a strictly sober man.

"No more ideas how it was done?" asked Ridley, and the smile which accompanied the words was somewhat reassuring.

"Confederate saw what you wrote and signalled it," suggested Purley.

"No—impossible. You could go where you liked to write it. You could examine the paper and envelopes both before and afterwards. You could even bring your own—all he stipulated was that they should be plain white paper. You could seal it yourself, hand it to the medium yourself and receive it back from him yourself. No confederate came into it at all."

"Then how was it done? I give it up."

"Spirits."

"Spirits be——" Purley remembered just in time that he was speaking to his superior officer.

"He said it was, anyway. I found out how to summon the spirits afterwards from a book written by a medium. I'll tell you about it later. What I want you to do is to come with me to the postmaster in about half an hour and distract his attention from me when I've got the letter. I'll go and arrange with him now, and in the meantime you've got to get me a specimen of Mrs. Laidlaw's writing—without letting her know that you're getting it, of course. I'll leave that to you."

With this Ridley left the room and went across to the post office, which was only about twenty yards down the street. Save for a retreating old age pensioner it was apparently empty, but as the inspector approached the counter he

perceived the seat of a pair of trousers behind the parcel end of it.

"Afternoon, Mr. Murdock," he said.

The gentleman addressed extricated his face, purple with exertion, from the depths of a large parcel basket and slowly resumed a vertical position.

"Hullo, inspector," he wheezed cordially. "What is it? Licences?"

"Not this time. I want you to do me a favour, unofficially."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

A small boy and an old woman entered at this moment.

"Can I come through?"

"Yes." Mr. Murdock lifted the counter flap, led the way into his office and despatched its solitary occupant to attend to the wants of the waiting customers.

"There's a letter in one of your boxes that I very much want to have a look at, Mr. Murdock. Can it be done?"

The postmaster looked dubious. The sanctity of His Majesty's mail is graven on the hearts of all good postmasters, but respect for the police is also inherent in them as citizens and ratepayers. Civil war at once broke out within Mr. Murdock.

"No—impossible. You could go where you liked to write it. You could examine the paper and envelopes both before and afterwards. You could even bring your own—all he stipulated was that they should be plain white paper. You could seal it yourself, hand it to the medium yourself and receive it back from him yourself. No confederate came into it at all."

"Then how was it done? I give it up."

"Spirits."

"Spirits be——" Purley remembered just in time that he was speaking to his superior officer.

"He said it was, anyway. I found out how to summon the spirits afterwards from a book written by a medium. I'll tell you about it later. What I want you to do is to come with me to the postmaster in about half an hour and distract his attention from me when I've got the letter. I'll go and arrange with him now, and in the meantime you've got to get me a specimen of Mrs. Laidlaw's writing—without letting her know that you're getting it, of course. I'll leave that to you."

With this Ridley left the room and went across to the post office, which was only about twenty yards down the street. Save for a retreating old age pensioner it was apparently empty, but as the inspector approached the counter he

perceived the seat of a pair of trousers behind the parcel end of it.

"Afternoon, Mr. Murdock," he said.

The gentleman addressed extricated his face, purple with exertion, from the depths of a large parcel basket and slowly resumed a vertical position.

"Hullo, inspector," he wheezed cordially. "What is it? Licences?"

"Not this time. I want you to do me a favour, unofficially."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

A small boy and an old woman entered at this moment.

"Can I come through?"

"Yes." Mr. Murdock lifted the counter flap, led the way into his office and despatched its solitary occupant to attend to the wants of the waiting customers.

"There's a letter in one of your boxes that I very much want to have a look at, Mr. Murdock. Can it be done?"

The postmaster looked dubious. The sanctity of His Majesty's mail is graven on the hearts of all good postmasters, but respect for the police is also inherent in them as citizens and ratepayers. Civil war at once broke out within Mr. Murdock.

Ridley had wisely put forward his request as a favour and not as a right, knowing full well that he had no power to enforce his demand, and this went far to gain the victory for him. There was no wounded official dignity to stiffen the opposition, and the civilian half of the post-master was disposed to be obliging. Ridley's garden and Mr. Murdock's allotment had a common boundary fence and a free interchange of garden tools and cuttings took place between the two.

"I haven't a warrant," went on the inspector. "I don't want to delay the mail, to open any letters or even to take them out of your sight. I only want to look at the outside of one envelope, and I'll guarantee to give it back to you as I found it."

This modest demand finally clinched the victory.

"Oh, if that's all, I can let you do that easily enough. Better not say anything about it, though."

"No, I shan't."

"Those cuttings is doing well—that last lot you gave me."

"Are they? Glad to hear it. If you want any more of them I've got plenty to spare. By the way, can you have the Castle Road box

cleared straight away? I'm rather in a hurry about the job."

"Yes, I can get that done inside twenty minutes."

"Thanks. I'll come back again."

Ridley's next move was to go to a chemist's shop farther down the street.

"Got any alcohol?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"How much is it?"

"Do you mean methylated spirit, sir? Tenpence a pint."

"No, that's not the sort I want. It isn't pure, is it?"

"No, sir, but it's quite all right for burning in lamps and that sort of thing."

"I know that, but I want something better."

"Absolute alcohol is what you want, then. That's ninety-nine per cent pure and costs one and six an ounce. Expensive stuff because there is such a big duty on it."

"Right. Give me an ounce of it and a small packet of cotton-wool, please."

Ridley pocketed his purchases and went back to the station.

"What have you done about that specimen of writing, Purley?" he inquired.

"I went to Jackson's, the grocers, sir, and

bought three small pots of jam—the very small sample size they sell for children, sir. There was—let me see—one of strawberry, one of marmalade and one of apricot." He slowly and carefully checked them over on his fingers.

Ridley, though a good disciplinarian, did not resent a mild joke at his own expense, especially from a man who could be trusted not to take advantage of it. Purley was evidently having his revenge for the mystification inflicted upon him in the matter of the séances.

"Go on," he said. "It doesn't matter about the maker's name."

"No, sir," replied Purley, with a face completely devoid of expression. "I got Jackson to do them up and enclose a note on a printed letter head requesting 'Dear Madam' to accept the enclosed samples and soliciting the favour of her esteemed patronage. Jackson was pop-eyed with curiosity by this time, so I addressed it myself after I had got away from the shop and tipped a railway parcel man to deliver it. The receipt should be here in a few minutes. He promised to bring it straight back."

"Good. As soon as it comes we'll go to the post office, and, remember, when I've got the letter I'll give you the tip and your job is to keep Murdock occupied. Now what about those

summonses for to-morrow? Are there many of them?"

"Seven, sir. Four motor cases, one drunk, one from the relieving officer——"

"What's that about?"

"Man who left his wife chargeable to the Guardians, sir. And one chimney on fire."

There was a rattle of iron-tyred wheels outside. Ridley looked at his companion.

"That it?"

"I should think so, sir. I'll go and see."

Purley came back jubilantly with a buff receipt form bearing the signature J. E. Laidlaw.

"It worked all right, sir," he exclaimed. "The only trouble would have been if the servant had signed it. Then we should have had to have tried something else."

Ridley folded up the paper and put it in his pocket, together with a magnifying-glass, a small ruler and a pair of dividers, which he took from the desk. The pair then crossed the road to the post office. A satchel full of letters was lying on the table in the inner room, with Mr. Murdock in excited attendance. Ridley produced the railway receipt form and began to go through them. Mrs. Laidlaw's writing was fairly distinctive and the wanted envelope was identified easily enough.

"Here we are," said Ridley. "You stop and see fair play, Mr. Murdock."

The invitation was superfluous, as the postmaster showed no signs of going.

The inspector solemnly produced his magnifying-glass, dividers and ruler and laid them in a neat row on the table. By the side of them he put his notebook and a pencil. He began operations by carefully measuring the length and breadth of the envelope and entering the figures in his notebook. Then he measured the distance of the stamp from the edges, using the dividers. This also was carefully recorded. The audience, both of it, was intensely interested. It was the first time Mr. Murdock had seen any detective work in progress and he racked his brains in vain for an explanation of what was happening. Detective Officer Purley was even more intrigued. He had no idea either what the inspector was doing, and he had an uneasy feeling that he ought to know.

Ridley laid down his dividers, took up his magnifying-glass and began to examine the envelope carefully. From time to time he paused and made entries in his notebook. Mr. Murdock, leaning over the chair back, could read them: "Good quality white paper, black ink, no watermark, no maker's name. Halfpenny

stamp slightly overlapping penny stamp at lower corner. Last line of address slightly smeared."

After a prolonged examination of the front Ridley turned the envelope over. As he did so he looked up with as near a wink as his dignity permitted. Purley interpreted this and an almost imperceptible jerk of the head to be his signal and strolled away as if bored with the whole proceeding. A couple of Morse telegraph keys lay side by side on a table at the back of the office, and he stood looking at these intently.

"I say, Mr. Murdock," he exclaimed, "isn't there something wrong here? Surely that wire oughtn't to be loose?"

The postmaster reluctantly tore himself away from his criminological studies and waddled across to the keys.

"Ay, you're quite right," he said, looking at the dangling wire and the frayed fragment attached to one of the terminals. "Got a knife on you?"

After prolonged searching of pockets Purley produced one and handed it over.

"Thanks," said the postmaster, as he began to peel the insulation off the end of the wire in readiness for reconnecting it. "Must have been one of those darned telegraph boys larking about again. It was right enough last time I used it.

If I've told them to keep out of here once, I've told them a thousand times. If I catch them messing about with it again I'll——"

Mr. Murdock's threats died away into a mumble as his stubby fingers endeavoured to coax the delicate strands of wire through the hole in the terminal. Before he had completed the repair to his satisfaction Ridley shut up his notebook with a snap and pocketed his apparatus.

"Finished now," he remarked. "I've left the letter on the desk. Thanks very much, Murdock. It isn't damaged or interfered with in any way, so nobody'll know anything about it if you don't tell them."

Purley sauntered casually over and took up the unopened envelope. What was the inspector getting at with all this rigmarole of measurements and magnifying-glasses? The detective officer could understand him wanting to know the contents of the letter, but to come along without a warrant and measure the envelope like a twopenny-halfpenny detective of fiction appeared to be the height of futility. And then all this silly talk of spirits and séances—— He pensively followed his superior back to the station.

"Worked very well," commented Ridley,

opening his notebook and laying it on the table. "Was that wire really loose or did you——?"

"I did," admitted Purley with a grin.

"Wilful damage to His Majesty's property," replied the inspector. "I forget the penalty. Anyhow, it served its purpose. I got a copy of the address and nearly the whole of the letter."

"What?"

"The contents of the letter." Ridley would have been more than human if he had not enjoyed his moment of triumph. "Here it is. I couldn't get quite all of it, but I got enough to see that we have drawn a blank. This is what it said:

DEAR KATE

Thanks ever so much for your very kind note of sympathy for my bereavement. It makes even a great sorrow just a little bit easier to bear if one knows that friends are sharing it. I can hardly realize my loss at present. When we came to South – – – – – – – – – hoping that Harry would – – – – get well and strong again. It seems to be a place of tragedy; only this morning a police – – – called here about a man who had disappear – –. I can't think why they should ask me about it. I shall – – – – here until the funeral is – – – – then I shall be only too pleased to accept your invit – – – – – – – will let you know later when

to expect me. It will be nice to – – – – somewhere to stay now that I am all alone.

Yours – – – – – –

JANET

"We've had all our trouble for nothing," went on Ridley. "It's only a very ordinary reply to a letter of condolence. Still, it's an interesting little experiment."

Purley scratched his head. "Do you mean to say——?" he began.

"I mean to say that that is a true copy of what was in that envelope as far as I could read it. I haven't invented it."

"But you couldn't—you didn't open it?"

"No, I didn't."

"Then how——?"

"Don't you remember me telling you about the medium answering sealed questions at the séance?"

"Yes, sir; but I thought that was only a conjuring trick."

"He said that spirits read the messages for him."

"No; but really, sir, how is it done?"

"Spirits, but not the sort of spirits he meant. Look here, I'll show you."

Ridley took a piece of paper and wrote on it

his name and address both in pencil and in ink. He then slipped it into an envelope and sealed it.

"Are you sure you can't read that without opening it?" he queried, tossing it across to Purley.

"Quite sure, sir," was the prompt reply. One glance at the stout white paper was enough to satisfy all doubts on the question.

Taking a small bottle from his pocket, the inspector poured some of the contents on to a piece of cotton-wool and swabbed the envelope with it. Instantly the paper became transparent and both the pencil and the ink writing stood out clearly legible through it.

"That's only half the trick," he explained. "Lots of things make paper transparent. Candle grease and oil, for example. But you can't soak a thing with oil and hand it back to the owner in a few minutes. But with this stuff—watch."

As he was speaking the wet patch shrank rapidly as the volatile alcohol evaporated, and in a very short time the paper resumed its original appearance.

"Good trick to try on your friends, that," said Ridley. "Only you must use pure alcohol. Methylated spirit has water in it and makes a mark on the paper, but the pure stuff leaves no trace at all. Petrol answers pretty well too, but

it smells too much. The missing words in the letter were the parts underneath the joints on the back of the envelope. Two thicknesses of paper and a layer of gum were a bit too much even for the spirits. I believe you thought I was talking through my hat all the time, now, didn't you ? "

" I—er—I didn't know what to think, sir," stammered Purley in some confusion, this last remark being uncomfortably near the bull's eye. " I couldn't make out what you were getting at. I suppose the measurements——"

" Merely camouflage. Not the least good, as far as I know, except to mystify old Murdock and give me an excuse for looking at the envelope. Anyhow, the whole thing is a wash-out and we shall have to go back to the beginning again."

CHAPTER III

MR. TOMLIN PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT

INSPECTOR RIDLEY had left instructions with the night duty officer that he was to be called if anything unusual was reported from Castle Road, but his sleep remained undisturbed. P.C. Jones, the first watcher, had left his report at the office before going off duty, but it contained nothing of special interest. Messrs. Johnson and Johnson, the undertakers, had called with a coffin in the early evening, and during the afternoon the widow had paid a visit to Madame Valette, who specialized in mourning clothes ready to wear in twenty-four hours. The usual barbaric funeral routine was apparently proceeding.

The man who relieved Jones for the night had even less to report. The house was in darkness by half-past ten and remained as silent as a respectable house should be until seven o'clock in the morning. Ridley read through these documents and promptly withdrew the watcher,

blaming himself for wasting time over a mere unsupported suspicion. The station sergeant informed him that he had telephoned to Croft Villa and that there was still no news. Shortly afterwards Rosenbaum arrived and stated that he had called at the office on his way and found it locked as they had left it.

Ridley began operations for the day by taking the clerk back to the office and going through the money-lender's letter files with him. They worked through several boxes of correspondence in silence. Letter after letter was hurriedly read and put aside as useless. Bills, invoices and receipts were all scrutinized regardless of their uninteresting and unpromising nature. The clerk reached down the last and most recent file with a grimace.

"Not much chance of finding anything here," he said as he opened it. "If there had been anything unusual in the letters during the last week or two I should have remembered it."

"Doesn't matter," said Ridley. "We'll go through the lot. It's no good half doing the job. After all, we don't know what we are looking for, so we mustn't take anything for granted."

The clerk uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise.

"Well, I've never seen this before," he said.

"And I always thought all the incoming letters went through me. It must have been sent to his house and filed by himself."

He detached a sheet of cheap pink notepaper from the clip and handed it to the inspector. It was the kind of shoddy stuff sold with envelopes and blotting-paper in penny packets and was covered with an uneducated scrawl containing a luridly worded threat to "put away" the recipient where no one would ever see him again. It was undated but filed with other letters received on the 25th of April, and Ridley was not surprised to see that it was unsigned. He was surprised, however, to see that the writer's cause for complaint was very different from what he had anticipated. Mr. Levinsky had not overcharged or pressed for repayment of money lent, but had flatly refused to lend any money at all. The writer appeared to be in urgent need of it and waxed indignant upon the iniquities of "advertisers what say they lend without inquiries and ask as many questions as a —— 'tec."

"The writing looks familiar to me," remarked Rosenbaum. "I've seen it before, and not so very long ago. It won't take long to look through the applications for loans during the last week or two and see if I can trace it."

He reopened one of the files and dug among its contents with the eagerness of a terrier at a rabbit hole. The rustling of papers suddenly ceased and he pulled one out with an air of triumph.

"This is it, inspector. I'm sure it is the same writing."

Ridley examined the document laid before him. James Tomlin, age thirty-four, cobbler, of 29 East Parade, Southbourne, had applied, it appeared, for a loan of two hundred and fifty pounds, and there was certainly some justification for his remarks about inquiries. The form was a double sheet of foolscap containing a long list of questions. At first sight it looked something like an income tax paper, but differed from it in that, in spite of its complexity, it was possible to make out what the questions meant. It needed careful comparison with the anonymous letter, because the writing of all uneducated adults, like that of young children, lacks the individuality and character which differentiates the writing of more literate persons. In spite of this Ridley was able to convince himself that the two papers were written by the same hand, so he put them both in his pocket and betook himself to East Parade.

Mr. James Tomlin was not one of Southbourne's

ornaments. His past was decidedly shady and the inspector had frequently come into professional contact with him before. Nominally a cobbler, he occasionally mended a few boots, but made no effort to attract custom. The little wooden shanty which he used as a workshop was more often closed than open, and his working hours would have satisfied the extremest upholder of ca'canny methods. No serious crime had ever been brought home to him, although the local police had their suspicions. Fortunately for him there had always been a lack of evidence, and his only appearances in court had been for a bewildering variety of small offences. The liquor laws and the betting acts were Mr. Tomlin's most frequent stumbling-blocks, but with fine impartiality he had also infringed the hackney carriage regulations, the firearms restrictions, the Shop Hours Act and many other threads of the legislative web with which he, in common with the rest of us, was surrounded. He always declared that he never broke any laws which carried a severe punishment. The police theory was that he was more careful when engaged on a bigger job.

He was standing at his door when the inspector arrived. He was a little, thin man with humorous eyes which partly redeemed the villainous aspect

of his unshaven chin. His neck was innocent of collar and his feet were clad in green carpet slippers, which proclaimed to the world at large that his labours for the day were either over or not yet begun—which, in a person of his habits, it was not easy to say.

"Good afternoon, James," said Ridley.

Mr. Tomlin, unaware of his approach, jumped and dropped his paper.

"Good afternoon," he replied, picking it up again and tucking in an unruly sheet. "I wor just reading that there speech of the Prime Minister's."

"Were you?" asked Ridley dryly. "When did they start printing politics on the back page? But I haven't come to talk about betting."

"Haven't you?" said the unabashed Mr. Tomlin with a smile of childlike innocence. "I'm reight sorry to hear that, because I could give you a fair grand un for the 3.30 to-morrow."

"Never mind about the 3.30. What did you want to borrow money from Levinsky for? That interests me more than anything just at present."

"I don't see what that's got to do with thee, inspector. Can't I borrow money just like onybody else? Onyway, I didn't borrow ony. T' mean old brute said I hadn't enough security."

"I know you didn't; but what about that letter you wrote to him on Monday?"

Mr. Tomlin's unshaven jaw dropped and he removed his pipe from the insecure grip of his broken and discoloured teeth.

"Has he put tha on to me for that?" he asked despondently. "Well, he's worse nor I thought he wor, and that's saying summat. If I told thee what I really thought of him I should get five bob and costs for obscene language. Tha knows me well enough, inspector, and tha knows I don't go in for owt risky. I nobbut meant it for a joke, just to get even like for not lending me owt. I didn't know he'd take the trouble to find out who wrote it. I'll promise thee I won't write to him again."

Ridley watched the cobbler while he was speaking. He had the half-resigned, half-amused expression of a man found out in some small transgression. He had replaced his pipe and the smoke rose from it in calm and unhurried puffs. The folded newspaper in his hand hung by his side uncrumpled and serene. If, as he implied, he knew nothing more of the business, his bearing was quite natural. If, on the other hand, he had a guilty conscience, he was an incredibly good actor.

"You may have meant it for a joke, Tomlin,

and any other time I should have believed you, knowing you as I do, but——"

"What's tha getting at, inspector? Out with it. What am I supposed to have done this time? Have I put old Levinsky off his grub or summat?"

"It's no laughing matter, Tomlin. Levinsky has disappeared."

"What!" There was no doubting the genuineness of the man's surprise. "How does tha mean —disappeared?"

"I mean exactly what I say," repeated Ridley patiently. "He simply vanished without leaving any trace. The point is, can you tell us anything about it?"

"Nowt at all." Every trace of flippancy had left the cobbler and he spoke with deadly seriousness. His pipe had gone out unheeded and his newspaper lay on the floor again. This time he did not pick it up. "I've told tha all I know," he went on, "and if I knew any more I'd tell tha that an' all. It's a bit awkward for me, owd lad. I wrote that letter and I'm not trying to get out of it, but I swear it wasn't meant serious like. The old blighter, to go and hop it a day or two after. I wonder if he did it a-purpose to get me into trouble?"

"I'm afraid not." Ridley could hardly refrain from laughing at this ingenuous suggestion. "He could have done that simply by handing over the letter to us, but he didn't. He kept it for some reason or other, and we found it in his office after he had gone."

"Well, by gosh, I hope he turns up again reight sharp. Tha's found me out in one or two things——"

"One or two!" interjected Ridley.

"Well, a dozen or two, then. I don't mind that, because I did them. Happen there's one or two things an' all tha hasn't found out. I don't mind that nawther. But to be found out for summat tha doesn't know owt about—— Nay, dammit. What if he's murdered? How about me then?"

"We don't know that he is murdered," replied the inspector soothingly, for the man before him was rapidly growing hysterical at the thought of his peril.

"But he might be! Are you going to arrest me?"

"No. No evidence. Merely a slight suspicion due to that letter of yours. We shall have to keep an eye on you, though. It's as much as my job is worth not to."

"Ay, but don't spend too much time doing it. Find him or find the chap 'at killed him. I shall

noan run away. Things look bad enough without making 'em worse. I'm frightened, Ridley, reight scared, not because I've done owt, but because I've been a fool over that there letter. I haven't much of a reputation to start with, and things might happen go bad with me."

"Don't worry," reassured Ridley, the armour of officialdom pierced by the genuine distress of the genial old ne'er-do-weel. "Nobody is going to charge you with murder because you've been pinched for street betting or for having a pint of beer after hours. When you see a policeman outside your house remember that it's only a routine precaution."

At this point a passing policeman came in sight and was ordered to watch Tomlin until a relief was sent. As Ridley turned to go he heard the shrewd old cobbler welcoming his shadower:

"By gum, lad," he said, "I'm noan going to lose sight of thee. There's nowt 'at will shift me out of this house till this job's cleared up!"

CHAPTER IV

THE STOLEN ADDRESS BOOK

TWO more days went by—forty-eight hours of strenuous activity for the Southbourne police and forty-eight hours of breathless gossip and speculation for the remainder of the inhabitants—but there was still no news of the missing man. The hospitals and workhouse infirmaries were revisited and one or two anonymous and unconscious individuals fruitlessly compared with Mr. Levinsky's description and photograph. All the local relieving officers (who are commanded by statute to apprehend and take before a justice any wandering lunatic) were interviewed, and the County Asylum itself was not neglected. A description was circulated to all police stations and front-page advertisements appeared in the "Southbourne Gazette" and the "Southbourne Recorder," accompanied by smudgy photographs and offers of reward, but no claimants came forward.

While these inquiries were being made, Ridley, with the assistance of the invaluable Rosenbaum,

compiled a list of the money-lender's former business acquaintances and sent Sergeant Collins to Bradford armed with it. He began to work steadily and conscientiously through his pageful of names and addresses, and his visits were of such short duration owing to their lack of success that he interviewed no less than seventeen firms in the course of a hard morning's work, during which he acquired a mild but growing wonder at the salient features of the town. Bradford, to the casual observer, is entirely populated by makers of noils and tops, which mysterious occupation appears to be productive of great wealth. People from other districts who are rash enough to visit the place in cars of less value than two thousand pounds creep about in a shamefaced manner and are submerged in endless streams of Rolls-Royces and Double Six Daimlers.

At half-past twelve Collins put away his list and adjourned to the nearest restaurant. He sat down at the marble-topped table and pushed back the coffee-cups in front of him. Two pennies were lying under the saucer, so he furtively replaced it and studied the gravy-splashed menu until the waitress arrived and began to remove the congealed remnants of the last customer's meal.

"Veal and ham pie, please," he ordered.

"Veal and ham pie's off," snapped the waitress, pocketing the pennies.

"Cold ham, then. And can you tell me what noils and tops are? I've been to seventeen places in this blessed town and nearly every one of them either made or sold the things, and I still don't know what they are."

"Something to do with waste wool in the worsted trade, I think," replied the waitress vaguely, miraculously balancing her loaded tray on one hand while she swabbed the coffee stains off the table top with the other. "I don't know much about them. Never been in a mill myself."

She made this confession almost apologetically. In a district where the majority of able-bodied females enter the mills from school as a matter of course there is no snobbery on this particular question, and Sergeant Collins escaped the scathing blast of indignation that would have withered him at the hands of a South Country waitress in similar circumstances. At this point the wandering eye of the manageress came to rest upon her and further conversation languished. Collins finished his meal and stepped cautiously out into the street. He was wearing crêpe rubber soles and the pavement was wet; those who have climbed the gradient of Darley Street will under-

stand the reason for his caution. He visited four more business offices and then turned his steps in the direction of the Great Eastern Hotel.

"Know anybody called Levinsky?" he asked the hall porter.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you seen anything of him lately?"

"Which one, sir? Mr. Isidore left this morning, Mr. Samuel was here last week and Mr. Louis the week before."

"Good heavens, man! Is this Bradford or Jerusalem?" Collins realized for the first time that the ghettoes of Leeds and Bradford are very extensive. He went on to the hotel office and interviewed the proprietor, who stated that he knew the Southbourne member of the tribe of Levinsky by sight and was quite certain that he had not stayed at the "Great Eastern" since the previous July.

This opinion he was able to verify by means of the visitors' register, and Collins returned to Southbourne having accomplished nothing. He found Ridley immersed in a batch of telegrams which had arrived during the afternoon.

"No luck, sir," reported the sergeant. "None of them have seen him for months."

"Neither have his relations," grunted Ridley. Reply paid telegrams had been sent to all the

relatives whose addresses could be ascertained from Rosenbaum and the servants. "And from the care they took in getting their replies into the regulation twelve words I gather that they don't particularly want to see him. Except this one," he added, picking up one of the flimsy papers and laying it in front of the sergeant. "That's from his brother."

Mr. Isaac Levinsky showed a much more personal feeling in his message. Not only did it express surprise, sorrow and inability to reply to the question asked, but it also added, with lavish disregard for economy of words, that he was coming to Southbourne at once and would call upon the inspector as soon as possible.

Mr. Isaac Levinsky arrived by the first available train. He was a dapper little man of unmistakably Jewish appearance, neatly and quietly dressed. In all things he avoided the ostentatious flashiness which is a failing of some of his race: heavy gold watch-chains and pointed, patent-leather boots were conspicuous by their absence. In their stead were an inconspicuous and severely unornamental silver wrist watch and plain black shoes; but it was typical of their owner that the watch, owing to the quality of its works, had cost more than most gold ones,

and the shoes were made to order by a high-class Gentile pirate whose exorbitant charges were only excused by his supreme reputation as a craftsman.

The emotional side of his nature prevailed so strongly that the initial part of the interview was quite useless, but just as the inspector's patience was reaching its limit the curious duality of the visitor's race became evident and the lamenting Oriental changed into the cool-headed Western business man.

"You can suggest no reason for your brother's disappearance, Mr. Levinsky?" inquired Ridley.

"None at all. He was not married, so there is no question of family troubles, and he was quite free from worry about money matters. He had a private income from savings of about three thousand a year as well as his share in the business, which brings him in at least another two thousand. Five thousand a year is not wealth in some people's estimation——"

"It is in mine," said Ridley, thoughtfully drawing little figures on his blotting-paper.

"But if you only spend half your income, whatever it is—and I am sure he never spent more than that—you are always rich, is it not so?" Mr. Levinsky's hands fluttered to the level of his shoulders with the palms upwards.

"Are you sure the business is still sound?"

"*Gott* of Israel, have I not just told you so?"

"Yes, but I understood from the clerk that you had resigned from it some years ago, and so I thought your information was—well, perhaps not quite up to date."

"No," was the reply, "I am still a partner. I have taken no active part in it since we removed from Bradford, and I suppose that is why the clerk thought I had retired altogether, but I still have a half share and I know it has been doing very well lately. Of course we work on a much smaller scale than we used to, but we can afford to do it. In fact, the business was only carried on as a kind of hobby for my brother. He was a man who had no interests outside his work and hated the thought of retiring, so I let some of my capital remain in his hands. It is partly to prevent damage to our business connection that I have come over here, but not altogether that, inspector. My brother and I are very fond of each other, and I want him found. Don't worry about expense—we can afford to pay anything in reason."

"I am not a private detective, Mr. Levinsky," said Ridley with a smile. "The question of fees does not arise."

"Well, is there any other way I can help?"

"Yes, there is."

Ridley went on to explain how he had been hampered in his investigations at the office. In the absence of the owner—which might, in theory, be a perfectly legitimate or voluntary one—and in the absence of theft, it had not been possible to ascertain whether the contents of the safe had been disturbed.

"Why didn't you break it open and make sure?" exclaimed Mr. Isaac excitedly.

"Can't make free with other people's property like that, sir," replied Ridley, aghast at such a lawless suggestion. "But if you can open it for us——"

"I have not got a key on me now," admitted the Jew. "But I can very soon get one. There are only two of them, one for each of us, and nobody else ever opens the safe. When I left the office mine was deposited at the bank for security, and it will still be there. I can get it and you can look inside as soon as you like."

"Good," responded Ridley. "That's what I've been wanting to do for three days."

As soon as the safe was open Mr. Levinsky went over the contents. True to the habits of a lifetime he sent Rosenbaum out of the room while he did so.

"Of course," he said, turning to the inspector, "I cannot tell you off-hand whether there is any money missing or whether any of these papers have been taken. My brother is the only man who knows exactly what was left there that night. I know we always used to keep about a hundred pounds in cash in these drawers, for use when the banks were closed, and all the promissory notes, the actual evidence of the debts, were stowed in bundles on these shelves. The only other thing of importance, besides our private pass-books, was——"

He hesitated, groping round in the semi-darkness for something.

"Turn the lights on, will you? It used to be kept on the bottom shelf, but I can't quite see—— That's funny. I can't feel it, either. Ah, that's better! Thanks. I can see now."

Mr. Levinsky opened the massive door wide and put his head inside the safe. He felt behind the promissory notes, opened the cash drawers, which were empty, and finally, not content with this, removed the bundles of papers until he could see the whole of every shelf.

"There is something missing," he announced excitedly, backing out of the safe and shutting the heavy door with a muffled clank and swish

of compressed air. "At least—— Just a minute until I make sure."

He went to the door of the private office and called the clerk.

"Has the office routine been altered in any way since I left?" he asked.

"No, sir. Things are just the same as they used to be."

"Mr. Israel kept the address book in the ordinary way?"

"Yes, sir."

"He hasn't started keeping it at the bank or letting you have it?"

"No. I never handled it in my life, and I know he hasn't taken it to the bank, because I saw him using it the last time he was here."

"Well, then, it has been stolen," said the partner with an air of finality. "Probably some money has gone as well, as the cash drawers are empty, but I couldn't swear to that."

"I don't understand," interposed Ridley. "Do you mind explaining why anybody should want to steal an address book?"

Mr. Levinsky put back all the papers, locked the safe and sat down at the desk.

"You saw for yourself that there wasn't a leather-bound book with a lock on it in the safe, I suppose?" he began.

"Yes."

"That book was always kept there—always. It never went out of our possession, and it was absolutely confidential. Rosenbaum says that it was still kept there in the usual way up to the time when my brother vanished, but I should have known that without asking him. You see, it is constantly in use, so it cannot be kept at the bank, and I know my brother never took it away with him. For one thing he will not do any business at home, and also he wouldn't feel happy unless it was locked up here. This safe is one of the best makes and as nearly thief-proof as possible."

"Yes, but——"

"I suppose you don't see the importance of an address book? Our business is rather a confidential one, you know, and there are some people who borrow money and are very anxious that nobody should know about it. They think it might damage their credit or their social position, so we have to accommodate them. Of course, all our transactions are secret, really, but these people want extra precautions taken and are prepared to pay for them. What we do is this. They choose an assumed name and address, and they are known by it in their dealings with us. The only record of their real name is in that book

which is missing, and which even the clerk is not allowed to see. Each person has to sign a declaration in that book acknowledging that the name on the documents is his *nom de guerre*, and we sign a statement that we will never divulge the connection between the two names unless he defaults and it is necessary in order to recover the debt. This means that we have to do a certain amount of clerical work ourselves which in ordinary cases would be done by the clerk, so we have to charge extra for the privilege. For example, the clerk will write a letter to one of these people under his assumed name, and then he has to hand it over to us. We have to look up the real name, address the envelope and post it ourselves."

"I see," said Ridley. "The point is, who would want to steal it and why?"

"The only sort of person interested would be somebody whose own name was in it. He would have been told that only one copy was kept, to avoid any chance of leakage, and, once he has opened the safe, all he has to do is to steal the book and his promissory note. Then no evidence of his debt is left at all. The clerk's books would enable us to trace the loss of a promissory note, but it would be in a false name and there would be no means of finding out the real one."

"Rather a weak point in your bookkeeping system?" suggested Ridley.

"Quite. As things have turned out it is, but it was unavoidable under the circumstances, except by a breach of faith with our customers, who were promised that no other copy existed. And you must remember that the book was so carefully guarded that it has only passed out of our possession this once in thirty-six years. I can't help thinking that something awful has happened to my brother."

At this point the East again showed signs of coming to the surface.

"It certainly sounds suggestive," put in Ridley hastily, in order to check this time-wasting metamorphosis. "But you can be quite sure that everything possible will be done to find him. We are not giving up hope yet by any means. The Chief Constable is determined to get to the bottom of it, and he has applied to Scotland Yard for assistance already. They are sending one of their men down, and I hope we shall be able to give you some better news soon. In the meantime, if you are stopping here, will you find out if any of the papers are missing and let me know?"

Mr. Levinsky was so eager to help that he was calling for the clerk before Ridley left the office.

He refused to leave until his task was finished and remained at work until the early hours of the morning, patiently checking the ledgers against the bundles of promissory notes in the safe. He felt repaid for his trouble, for he was able to leave a message with the constable on night duty at the station stating that a promissory note for five thousand pounds was missing, made out in the name of Edward Derrington, of 17 Chapel Street, Aintree, Liverpool. On further investigation he had found, as he expected, that the name was an assumed one and could not be identified in the absence of the address book. He was also able, as a result of his labours, to state definitely that the firm was sound and even prosperous from a financial point of view. The constable informed him, in return, that Scotland Yard had wired to say that they were unable to trace the finger-print which had been found on the safe handle.

CHAPTER V

A DISCREPANCY IN THE TIME-TABLE

INSPECTOR DENNIS DRURY of Scotland Yard was a big man, even measured by constabulary standards. He stood six feet two and a half inches in his boots, and his broad chest and powerful shoulders carried nearly fifteen stones without an ounce of fat. Endowed by Nature with a good physique, it was one of his ambitions to keep it, and for a man of middle age he had succeeded remarkably well. Nearly thirty years previously, before he joined the force, he had been a keen footballer, which gave him the strenuous exercise for which his soul craved. Like many other young men he married (and like many other big men he married a small wife) and found that his income did not expand as rapidly as his responsibilities. At that time he was living in the North of England, and so he was fortunate enough to be able to make his recreation add to his earnings. On the strength of an international cap he left the Rugby Union,

forfeited his amateur status for ever and joined the Rugby League.

It is a curious fact that professional Rugby is practically confined to Yorkshire and Lancashire, and it is difficult to explain why it should be so. It is not Rugby that the Southerner objects to, because he supports it strongly in its amateur form. It is not the professional element, for this he also supports in the Association teams. The League game is Rugby football altered in many ways to improve it as a spectacle—for the sake of the gate-money. Six forwards instead of eight, the abolition of the line-out and of the conventional form of touch-kicking all tend to lessen the number of stoppages and to make the game, already a fast one, still faster. It has the advantage that it has not been spoiled by the emasculated prettiness which makes professional Soccer so inferior to the forceful amateur game. It is played all out all the time with an amazing energy, stimulated by the fact that the players are partly paid by results. Only the best are good enough and many an obscure little town has a team of international ability.

Drury had played forward for a team which was near the top of the League, which was adequate testimony to his endurance and toughness, qualities which, as he fully realized, were

important advantages in his later profession and well worth preserving as far as possible.

Brains, of course, are essential for the investigation of crime, and of these he had his full share, or he would not have reached his present position; but the science and art of the detective, though they may begin, do not as a rule end in an armchair. Many professional men may be mere thinking machines; a consulting physician can be a physical wreck, a successful barrister may be obese and flabby and an accountant may be asthmatical without much loss of efficiency. But when the detective is fortunate enough to solve his problem and arrest his man the criminal has no appreciation for the academical excellence of the work which his pursuer has done, and in a rough house the velvet glove of a powerful intellect is of little service unless it is backed up by the iron hand of an efficient body.

One wet Sunday afternoon in May Inspector Drury had been putting his principles into practice by giving a lesson in ju-jutsu to his fourteen-year-old son. The combatants had ceased their tramping and bumping and come downstairs for a rest, much to Mrs. Drury's relief—for the plaster of the kitchen ceiling was badly cracked and the landlord could not be

persuaded to repair it. Tea was not yet ready, and Drury was instantly seized by two small girls, one of them his own and the other her friend from next door. They clambered up on to his knees and waved before his eyes two grubby pieces of paper and a much-bitten pencil stump.

"Draw something, daddy," demanded Ellie—short for Eleanor—his daughter.

"What shall I draw?"

"Draw a pig."

"What sort of a pig?"

"A fat one!" shrieked both of them in chorus.

He took the proffered pencil and two small heads bent over and breathed heavily upon the paper in anticipation.

"There. Will that do?"

"No. He hasn't got a tail." Squeals of delight attested the popularity of an old and familiar joke.

"There, now he has a squiggly one."

"Now draw a cat, daddy." The newly created pig was pushed ruthlessly aside.

Drury solemnly copied his previous drawing, but substituted a vertical line for the squiggle, and a cat it was within the meaning of the act.

"Now I'm tired," he said. "You draw something."

"I bags first. I'll draw a golliwog." Ellie grasped the pencil dagger-fashion, put out her tongue and drew an irregular lemon.

"What's that?" asked her father tactlessly.

"That's his head," she replied reproachfully.

A wobbly square followed.

"That's his tummy," she explained. "All golliwogs have square tummies."

This anatomical fact was new to Drury, but he accepted it with due gravity. He was immensely popular with children because he never laughed at them at the wrong time. The little girl from next door then had her turn and drew a cottage loaf with two handles on it, which she declared to be an authentic portrait of Benjamin Bunny Rabbit. At this moment the telephone bell rang and the two artists were gently decanted on to the floor.

"Hallo. Drury speaking. What do you say? Southend—oh, Southbourne. Yes, I thought they would be calling us in. No, I don't know anything about it except the newspaper reports. You say the Chief wants me to go to-night? What about trains? The 6.30 express. Thanks."

And so it happened that Inspector Dennis Drury found himself at Southbourne, his week-end at home abandoned *sine die*.

As soon as he arrived he deposited his bag at

the left luggage office and inquired the way to the police station, having decided not to engage rooms before consulting the local men.

He had a pleasant surprise when he was shown into the inspector's office and found that Ridley was the man with whom he was to co-operate. The two officers had been stationed in the same town many years before as newly joined constables, so they met as old friends and greeted each other cordially.

"This is like old times again," commented Drury, settling himself as comfortably as possible in a hardwood arm-chair. "I'd no idea you were at Southbourne, Ridley. It's so long since we saw each other that I'd lost track of your movements altogether."

"It must be fifteen years since we left Sheffield."

"More than that, I should think. Nearer twenty."

"Perhaps so. It's too long to talk over here, anyhow. Come across with me and have some supper and tell me what you have been doing with yourself."

There was an interval of an hour and a half, devoted to intermittent eating and reminiscences, at the end of which Ridley produced a

large bundle of papers and pushed it across the table to his guest.

"Do you want to know anything about it to-night, or shall we start fair in the morning?"

"I think I'll give these notes a miss until to-morrow. I don't feel much like studying details after a Sunday evening train journey, but I should like you to tell me about it, if you don't mind. Then I can get a general idea of things without having to think too much. I know nothing more than the newspaper reports at present."

"Right. Shall we go out or stay here?"

"Let's go out. It seems a shame to stay inside on a beautiful evening like this."

They left the house and walked along the Southbourne Esplanade to the extreme end. It was comparatively deserted, being too early in the season for visitors.

"Let's go on a bit," said Drury. "I hate these concrete cliffs."

"Better not let the Corporation hear you say that," replied Ridley. "They are very proud of their sea front."

They tramped another half-mile or so until the harsh smoothness of the artificial promenade and the pretty ugliness of the Esplanade Gardens disappeared from sight round a bend, and the

untouched beauty of the rugged coastline stretched before them as far as the setting sun. Drury heaved a sigh of relief and drew deep breaths of salt and seaweed into his lungs.

"It's good to be away from London for a bit," he said. "Let's go down towards the beach and find somewhere to sit."

They clambered down a sheep track that descended the steep slope of the cliffs, to the manifest disgust of a pair of lovers who had staked out their claim close by, and ensconced themselves comfortably in a little grassy hollow just above the point where the joyous green of the land gave place to the sullen brown of the seaweed.

"Now then," exclaimed Drury, wedging one foot into a rabbit hole and dislodging an inconvenient thistle with the other, "fire away. I'm ready."

For the next hour he lay with his eyes shut and listened to the tale that Ridley told, a tale at first sight as commonplace and monotonous as the noise of the surf which formed a background to the voice of the teller, but which was to prove as deep and mysterious as the sea itself.

"That's the whole story," concluded Ridley. "And I must say that I'm completely and absolutely stuck. We've made all the inquiries I

can think of, and I don't know what to do next. What do you suggest?"

"Nothing, off-hand," was the discouraging reply, and Ridley's face fell. The speaker laughed. "Don't look so blue about it," he went on. "That's rather a compliment to you. It means that you have done all the preliminaries so thoroughly that you haven't left any loose ends sticking out for the first passer-by to get hold of. We shall have to think this out. Question number one, Why does a person disappear? There are three reasons that I know of. The first one is that he disappears because he wants to, either because he has done something illegal or because he is in money difficulties, or is frightened of something. There is no evidence in favour of any of these, with the possible exception of Tomlin's letter, and I don't think we need take that seriously."

"Glad you think that. What makes you say so?"

"Why, don't you agree?"

"Yes, I do; but I'm judging by my personal knowledge of the man. You don't know him, so I wondered why you thought his threats were of no importance."

"I'm simply going by their effect on Levinsky. If he had been frightened by that letter he would

either have put the matter into your hands or else disappeared at once, if he thought that was the best thing to do. He did neither. He put it in a letter file and let two clear days go by before he attempted to go. That doesn't sound as if he was in terror of his life."

"No, it certainly doesn't," agreed Ridley.

"The second reason to account for a disappearance is an accident or loss of memory, both of which generally land you in hospital sooner or later. You've pretty well excluded these explanations. That only leaves one other, and that is *force majeure*."

"Eh?" said Ridley.

"Kidnapping or murder. Abduction being rare in this country, murder seems to be the likeliest thing. Mind you, we're not certain of this."

"How does it help us, anyhow?"

"It shifts our ground a bit. We are no longer looking for Levinsky, who may have disappeared for any of these reasons, but we are looking for the man who removed him. Pure assumption, of course, but it gives us a lead."

"Does it? I'm glad you think so."

"Yes." Drury got up and assumed a pontifical attitude. "There are two sorts of criminals, and only two," he continued after a pause. "The

first and lowest type are the unskilled labour of the underworld and have not enough intelligence to plan or foresee the future. They commit petty crimes to satisfy a want, or worse ones to satisfy an impulse, or else they are a bit mentally deficient."

"Lombroso's born criminals, eh?" suggested Ridley.

"No, not quite that. I know nobody believes his theories nowadays about the physical stigmata of crime. After all, it's a bit far-fetched to argue that a man is predestined to a life of crime just because he has a peculiar shaped ear or a receding forehead. All I say is that some crooks are of low intelligence just as some honest people are. Their procedure is faulty in design and clumsy in execution. They don't take many precautions against detection because it is beyond their intellectual level."

"I know the sort you mean. They specialize very rigidly, don't they?"

"Yes, because they haven't got the originality to do anything else. They aren't much trouble as a rule, and their capture is more or less routine work. Well, it isn't one of this sort who murdered Levinsky, if he was murdered. If it had been, he would have done it with a poker or a meat chopper or something equally crude, and either

left the body lying about or made some perfectly futile attempt to hide it. The other class of criminal is entirely different. He is an intelligent chap who plans his work carefully and also arranges his escape or alibi beforehand."

"I see all that, but I don't see what you are getting at."

"Coming to that in a minute. If Levinsky has been murdered, it has been done by an intelligent person who has removed the body and hidden it so well that we don't even know for certain that there is a body at all. The trouble is that it is a darned difficult matter for anybody, even if he is intelligent, to foresee the future, unless he is Old Moore or Zadkiel, and this is the weak spot of all the precautions that criminals take. Everything has to be arranged beforehand, and I think that it is almost impossible to plan things so perfectly as to leave no trace of having done so. In other words a pre-arranged sequence of events, if you investigate it closely enough, nearly always shows some feature of difference from the same sequence proceeding naturally. That's my pet theory. They say that no cipher or cryptogram is absolutely undecipherable: that what the human brain can conceal it can reveal. It's just the same with criminals' precautions. The great thing is to go through the

details carefully—all the details—and try and find out if there is any evidence of pre-arrangement."

In the morning Drury started work in earnest and spent several hours in the office with a writing pad and the notes of the case before him. He had an invariable habit of arranging facts in chronological order, a peculiarity which was so marked that certain of his irreverent subordinates always referred to him as Bradshaw, except when he was present. This careful study of times was one of his ways of putting into practice the theory which he had expounded to Ridley on the previous evening, and, true to his nickname, he began this case, as he had begun many others, by arranging all the ascertainable facts in the order of their occurrence and asking endless questions about the exact time of each event. The size of the pile of papers which Ridley had laid before him disturbed him not at all, and the latter was duly complimented on the fullness and clearness of his reports.

"There may be a deuce of a lot of it," he said in response to Ridley's apologies for the volume of documents, "but it isn't your fault if it happens to be a long case."

"But it seems so silly," protested Ridley, "to

bother you with all that stuff about delaying the mails and reading a perfectly harmless letter. The whole thing was a wash-out from start to finish, and it was all my fault for suspecting somebody when there really wasn't any evidence at all."

"Never mind that. The mere fact that you found a line of inquiry, even if it was a dud, is more than some people would have done. After all, you must start somewhere. Besides, you couldn't ignore the evidence of the speedometer. It would have been daft not to have followed that up. And, anyhow, if you've excluded even one person from suspicion it narrows the field a bit. However, I'm not going to think about your theories yet, whether they are right or wrong; we can talk those over later on. I'm going to take the case as it stands and go through your facts with an open mind. I shall fill in the gaps in this time-table first and then see if everything fits in as it should, or if there is any sign of things being cooked to fit."

Ridley left him to it and went over to the police-court on other business. While he was there a constable came across with a note from Drury, apologizing for disturbing him and asking if it was possible to get to know the time of posting of Mrs. Laidlaw's letter. He had, he

explained, no special reason for asking this, except that his time-table was incomplete. Ridley, immersed in a sheaf of charge-sheets, silently condemned Drury and his time-table as an unmitigated nuisance, but fortunately it happened that the bearer of the note was the man who had seen the incident, so a reference to his notebook answered the question with very little trouble.

As soon as the usual Monday morning's harvest of drunk and disorderlies was disposed of and the Great Unpaid had retired to the Mayor's Room, Ridley went back to his office.

"I've found something that wants explaining very badly," remarked Drury as he entered.

"Already?"

"Yes; and I think your first shot probably wasn't so wide of the mark after all. I started off with the idea of making this list absolutely comprehensive, and including every fact we know, whether it seemed to have any bearing on the case or not. You see, the whole thing is so indefinite that we simply don't know what is important and what isn't. You can't hang your hat up on a single point anywhere. As far as I can see the whole blessed case consists of questions and no answers. Here are some of them." He took up a sheet of paper covered

with his neat writing. "Why was Levinsky near Laidlaw's house? What does Mrs. Laidlaw know about him to make her faint? Osborne attended Levinsky and fell out with him. Osborne attended Laidlaw. Does he know anything about it? Has Levinsky levanted with the address book and, if so, why? Or has it been stolen? If it has, who stole it? If Derrington did, is he a murderer as well? What was Tomlin doing that night? If he is a murderer, what has he done with the body? Thank goodness Laidlaw himself is out of it, anyway, but the others are all mixed up together without rhyme or reason. I've had a talk with Osborne on the phone and got the details of his part in it. You have a look at this and see what you make of it. Here's the first sheet."

5 years ago Levinsky came to Southbourne.
4 years ago Levinsky began to owe money to Dr. Osborne.
(Query, does Osborne owe him any?)
April 18th Dr. Laidlaw came to Southbourne.
April 24th Tomlin threatened Levinsky.
April 25th Dr. Laidlaw taken ill.
April 26th, 9 p.m. Dr. Osborne wrote to Levinsky.
10 p.m. Dr. Osborne saw Dr. Laidlaw as a patient.
April 27th Dr. Osborne saw Laidlaw twice.

April 28th, 8 a.m. Dr. Laidlaw died.
9 a.m. Levinsky absent from his office.
9.50 Rosenbaum rang up the police.
10–11 Investigation at the office.
11–12 „ „ house.
12–1 p.m. „ Castle Road.
1–2.30 Inquiries in Castle Road by P.C. Roberts. Hospitals questioned.
2.45 P.C. Jones arrives at Castle Road to watch the house.
2.50 approx. Mrs. Laidlaw posts her letter.
3–5 Examination of the mail.

Ridley studied the list carefully, but was forced to admit defeat.

"All the facts are too familiar to me now," he said ruefully. "I can't look at them from a fresh angle."

"It's too quick," said the man from Scotland Yard. "Laidlaw died at eight o'clock in the morning and his wife—or widow—posted that letter before three in the afternoon."

"Well, why shouldn't she?" asked Ridley, astonished. "People generally tell their friends pretty soon when there is a death in the family."

"Quite so. But have another look at the copy of her letter. Jolly good thing you did copy it,

by the way. She was not informing the unknown Kate of the death, but replying to a letter of condolence from the said Kate, who already knew about it. That's obvious from the wording of it. In other words this friend, who lives eighty miles away, had not only heard of the 8 a.m. death—which she might have done by telephone—but she is supposed to have written to the widow, who received her letter and posted a reply to it in less than seven hours. With all due respect to the P.M.G., it can't be done. There's something wrong somewhere, Ridley. Kate and Janet are altogether too quick on the job. I don't see what in Hades it's got to do with Levinsky or anybody else, but it seems to me to want investigating."

"It certainly does." Ridley pushed his cap to the back of his head and stared at his colleague. "You are quite right. It's a smart bit of work, but as far as I can see it's made things a good deal more complicated than before."

"Can't help that, and as regards smartness it's as much yours as mine. You gave me such a complete account of things that all I had to do was to pick your brains. You can't even do that with some people, because they haven't got any. What about interviewing Osborne for a start?"

"Why him in particular?"

"I don't know. The whole thing is so damned illogical that we can't be logical. He might at least be able to tell us something about this widow, and I'm thinking that the more we know about her the better. I suppose you've wired to Liverpool about Derrington?"

"Yes, as a matter of form. Nobody of that name or address is known."

The two detectives had got a few hundred yards from the police station on their errand when Ridley stopped and smote his thigh a mighty blow.

"I believe I've got it!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "If that letter isn't in cipher it has only two meanings."

"Well, what are they?"

"One is that it means what it says and what I thought it meant, but you've just proved that to be impossible. The other is that it is conveying some information in an apparently innocent way in case the letter goes astray. The only information in it, barring the bogus stuff about the note of sympathy, is that we have got wind of Levinsky's disappearance and have traced him to Castle Road."

"That's a sound theory. If it is true it means that Kate had something to do with the disap-

pearance, and Mrs. Laidlaw knows it and is warning her. Ridley, I'm longing to meet Kate more than ever."

"Mrs. Laidlaw must be a cool hand, in spite of her fainting, if she uses her husband's death as a sort of code to carry a message."

"She must; and, I say, do you remember what she said at the end of the letter?"

"Er—yes, something about going to stay with Kate after the funeral."

"That's right. That's her second bit of news, and she means it. She will never think of an innocent letter like that being deciphered even if it was read by somebody else, and if we have her shadowed by a good man, so that she doesn't suspect anything, she'll lead us to Kate all right."

"I'll put somebody on to her as soon as we get back to the office. There's no great hurry. She'll stop till after the funeral. And I'll make Tomlin's shadowing more conspicuous so as to put her off the scent."

At this moment Dr. Osborne and his friend the bank manager were again in the arm-chairs by the fire, conversing inevitably about the disappearance, which was now common property.

"I shouldn't be surprised," remarked Woods casually, "if they arrested you for doing away with old Levinsky!"

"Me? What the devil do you mean?"

"Remember that letter you wrote to the late lamented? The police are sure to see it sooner or later."

"Oh, that? They are quite welcome to see it. The man should pay his debts before he goes if he must go like this!"

"Seriously, though, there's another man who wrote to him and who looks like getting into trouble over it."

"I haven't heard about that. Who was it?"

"Tomlin, the retired poacher in East Parade. It seems he threatened Levinsky a few days ago, and as things have turned out it was rather an injudicious thing to do."

"I should think it was! I'm glad I didn't put any threats in. My letter didn't exactly breathe a spirit of brotherly love, but it was hardly enough to make him bolt."

"Tomlin swears he only sent it as a joke, but it looks like being a serious joke for him."

"I'm inclined to believe him, personally, because he is a cute old chap, and he'd never do anything so daft as to put his threats down in writing and then carry them out. He's had far too much experience of the police to leave evidence lying about like that. He is a patient of mine, and I like him immensely, although he

is an old rascal. I remember digging about a dozen small shot out of his back the last time there was an epidemic of poaching round here, and he had the cheek to tell me that his trigger had caught in a hedge!"

"Well, doesn't that sometimes happen?" asked Woods, who scarcely knew one end of a gun from the other.

"It does, but you don't catch a man like Tomlin, who was born with a gun under his arm, doing such a damn silly trick. Besides, a shot-gun, fired at a range of six inches, doesn't distribute ten or twelve pellets under the skin. It blows a hole as big as a quarry."

"I wonder what his defence will be?"

"Defence? There isn't any need for one yet. They can't accuse him of anything. The police may be morally certain that something has happened, but they can't prove it. Where's the body, for one thing? Ridley asked me the other day if I could help him at all, as I was Levinsky's doctor, but all I could say was that he was in pretty good health as far as I knew and not likely to have died suddenly. Another inspector called Drury rang me up this morning and asked me a whole lot of questions about that man I went to see last time you were here. All my patients seem to be getting mixed up with the

police nowadays. I don't know what Laidlaw had been doing, and I don't suppose it matters much now in any case. He's out of their jurisdiction."

"Has he bolted as well? Where's he gone to?"

"I don't know," replied Osborne dryly. "I only sign death certificates. I don't put the destination on them."

Just as the bank manager's hopes of a second mystery were thus rudely shattered the housemaid, a lady who never wasted words, opened the door.

"Two p'leecemen to see you, sir," she announced abruptly.

"Ask them to come in," replied Osborne.

"There you are," said Woods, with the air of a prophet who has prophesied truly, or a tipster who has tipped a winner. "What did I tell you? I should take my wrist watch off if I were you."

"What for?"

"So that they don't break the glass when they put the handcuffs on."

Osborne laughed and got up to meet the visitors. Ridley entered, followed by his colleague, whom he introduced. Their host apologized for his housemaid's estimate of their rank and pulled the couch forward.

"Sorry to bother you again, sir," began the

local inspector, accepting a cigarette and lighting it. "But we want a bit more information, if you can supply it. When you attended the late Dr. Laidlaw, did he or his wife talk about any of their friends or relations?"

"No; I never heard him speak at all. He was unconscious every time I saw him, and his wife and I talked about him and nothing else. They were new patients of mine and I only saw her a few times, remember. Besides, there isn't often much small talk when patients are seriously ill. That comes later, when they are getting better."

"I wasn't implying that you were in the habit of gossiping, doctor, but I thought it was possible that friends might have been mentioned. You have no idea who Kate is, then?"

"Not the slightest. May I ask why you want to know?"

"We think Mrs. Laidlaw had something to do with the Levinsky case, but the whole thing is rather obscure as yet."

"I see."

"We are very anxious," put in Drury, "that she should not know that we are interested in her. This is all in strict confidence. If it leaks out it may ruin our chances of finding out what happened to Levinsky."

"Quite. I won't mention it to anybody." There were vague confirmatory noises from Woods, who was included in the warning glance from the inspector's eye.

"Another thing, doctor, if you will pardon a personal question. Were you a client of Levinsky's?"

"Me? Good heavens, no! I'm not a rich man, but I don't owe anything, and if I did I shouldn't go to a money-lender to help me out. I get lots of circulars from them—or I used to before they were stopped sending them—but they were all much too good to be true."

"You don't know anything about the address book, then?" asked Ridley suddenly, watching Osborne keenly.

"What address book?" asked Osborne blankly.

An almost imperceptible nod of reassurance passed from the local inspector to the stranger.

"It's of no consequence, doctor. Only a book belonging to Levinsky that we are looking for, and we think he might have given it to one of his clients."

"Well," said Osborne, smilingly, "I hope I have convinced you that I haven't murdered him. If you ask me many more questions that

I can't answer I shall seriously think of bribing Woods here to prove an alibi for me."

"No need for that, sir. When a murder is committed there is usually a motive, and I can't think of any particular reason why you should want to kill a money-lender to whom you don't owe anything."

"My dear inspector, if you were the police officer of the detective stories you would have arrested me long since. They always arrest the wrong man, and I should have had to go to a private detective to prove my innocence. If you really tried you could cook up quite a good case against me. He owed me forty pounds and I had just written him a letter in which I told him pretty plainly what I thought of him. Have you seen it?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll know my fluent style and classical English. I worked in the true commercial touch—details herewith and so on. No business letter is complete without 'herewith.' Oh, dash it all, I forgot to put 'one enclosure' at the bottom of it, and there was an enclosure in it, because I sent him an account rendered. Well, if this chap is still alive, I lose him as a patient and I lose my forty pounds as well, because I shan't bother to sue him for it. If he

is dead his executors will pay my bill, because executors are like companies and have no soul and therefore cannot be insulted, so I stand to gain by his death. Now, then, bring out the handcuffs. It's a fair cop."

"We might have arrested you for that in fiction, doctor, but I'm afraid we should have a bit of trouble in real life to persuade a jury to believe that a man of your position is going to throw it away for forty pounds. No, if you really want arresting you'll have to think of something better than that! It is a funny thing, though, that in our profession the amateur is always supposed to do better than the professional."

"It's just the same with us. The quacks always claim to be able to do far more than we can."

"I suppose they do." Ridley looked at his watch and got up. "We must be going now, doctor. Thanks very much for allowing us to waste your time."

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD

THE late Dr. Laidlaw's funeral was a very modest one. Modest in size, that is to say, for even the acutest of the imperfectly concealed critics who watched its progress from behind the curtains of Castle Road admitted freely and handsomely that Messrs. Johnson and Johnson had carried out their work with their usual elegance and refinement. The dead man, being a visitor and apparently a man of few relations, had only one mourner, his widow, but the top-hats of Mr. Johnson sen. (who drove the hearse) and Mr. Johnson jun. (who drove the solitary carriage) were just as shiny and the horses' long tails as carefully trimmed as if it had been the funeral of a councillor or alderman. By such tactful attention to details had Messrs. Johnson and Johnson attained the position of leading undertakers of Southbourne. The pretty widow's neat but expensive costume was the subject of many envious glances, and her becoming attitude

of grief met with general approval from the self-appointed connoisseurs.

The usual small group of ghoulish idlers collected at the garden gate, and again at the cemetery, but only a very careful observer would have noticed that one of them had carried his curiosity to such a pitch as to be present in both places. This rather seedy looking and entirely inconspicuous individual was officially known as Detective Officer James Purley, and he was an adept in the art of unsuspicious loitering. During the graveside ceremony he remained outside the cemetery railings and leaned over a neighbouring gate in conversation with a farmer. Later he followed the widow at a discreet distance on her melancholy and lonely return to the house, but stopped at a corner about a hundred yards short of it. From here he could see both doors of Holm Lea, and his position was strategically good. Close by was a public-house which had a telephone available, and the additional advantage that a man could lounge there for hours without attracting attention.

As it began to get dusk he left his haven of refuge and gradually approached the house. When it was quite dark he entered the garden and crept noiselessly on rubber soles to the dining-room window. The curtains were drawn,

but a shaft of light, outlined distinctly in the night mist, showed that they had been carelessly adjusted. Purley approached cautiously, assisted by the concrete surfaced paths, which lacked the treacherous crunchiness of gravel, and found that a small gap had been left, through which a distinct view of the interior could be gained. The newly made widow was sitting at a table writing. Her attitude was by no means one of depression, and Purley gathered from it that she was not unduly sorrowing over the death of her husband. On the contrary, she had a contented smile on her face and the bearing of one from whose shoulders a load has been lifted.

As Purley watched she finished her letter and turned her attention to a printed form lying by her side. This she filled up slowly and carefully, as though it was a document of great importance, finally signing it and enclosing it in a foolscap envelope. Try as he would, Purley could not see what it was or to whom it was addressed.

Picking up the two letters she switched off the light and left the room. The man outside listened to her brisk and jaunty step down the passage and the sound of her subdued but cheerful whistling.

"H'm. Hope my missus doesn't look like

that when she comes back from my funeral," he muttered as he crossed the path and stepped into the shadow of the hedge. The front door opened and Mrs. Laidlaw came out. She left the garden by the front gate and crossed the road to the pillar-box. As soon as she came back again and the dining-room light appeared once more Purley went back to the public-house and spent twopence on a telephone call.

At ten o'clock his relief arrived and informed him that the long envelope contained a claim on the Diamond Insurance Company for payment of a four-thousand-pound policy, while the other letter notified Miss K. Barrett, of 47 Queen Anne Street, Birmingham, that the writer was about to pay her promised visit.

"Accommodation address, I suppose?" said Purley.

"Yes. Tobacconist's shop. They found that out from the Birmingham police directly Drury smelt a rat in the first letter. This one is just the same sort as the other. Quite innocent to look at, but it tells Kate that we are not bothering any more about the Laidlaws. It even mentions the extra man who's been put on to shadow Tomlin. No flies on Drury, eh? She's going to Birmingham to-morrow for two days, she says. I left the inspectors making their arrangements

for following her, and they are as pleased as Punch about it."

"And she's pleased about drawing the insurance money, so they're all happy. And I'm going to bed, so I'm happy. You're the one who's got the dog to hold. This beastly mist's going to get thicker too. If you want to get close up to the house, by the way, use the front gate—the back one creaks too much. You're in for a dull night, anyhow. She won't do anything until she pays her visit to Kate."

"No, I don't suppose she will."

"Well, I'll get along now and see what my missus has got for supper. Good night."

"Good night."

"If she goes, and she will go," said Drury, looking up from the L.M.S. time-table, "I'll follow her and take Purley with me."

"I'd like to come too," replied Ridley. "But it's not necessary and, anyway, my other work has got so behindhand that I simply must let this blessed case slide for a bit unless anything special turns up."

The two were discussing their plan of campaign after reading Mrs. Laidlaw's second letter, extracted from the pillar-box within half an hour of Purley's telephone call. The identity of the

mysterious Kate was about to be revealed, of that they were convinced, but whether it would prove to be a fact of importance or not they frankly could not decide. However, one step at a time is enough when it is a step in the dark.

A familiar voice was heard outside and Levinsky's chauffeur-gardener was ushered into the office.

"I found something this afternoon, gentlemen," he began, "and I thought you'd like to see it as soon as possible. I'd have brought it along before, only my wife is ill and I couldn't get away until now."

"Sorry to hear that," said Ridley sympathetically. "Hope she'll soon be better. What is it you found?"

"This," replied the man, producing a crumpled scrap of paper and laying it on the table. It was covered with dust and dirty engine oil, but the writing on it was still legible. "I found it jammed down behind the front seat of the car," explained the chauffeur. "I was dusting all the inside of the bodywork, as it hasn't been used for a few days, and I found it when I took the seat cushion out."

"Thanks very much. Leave it with us, will you?"

"Right you are, sir. Good night, gentlemen."

Ridley escorted him to the door and came back to the table to find Drury smoothing out the paper.

HOLM LEA
SOUTHBOURNE
Apr. 27th

DEAR SIR

As you know, I owe you £5000. I am in urgent need of a further loan, this time of twice that amount, for which I have ample security. It is absolutely essential that I should have a definite answer to-night, so I should be very glad if you would come round and see me. I am sorry to trouble you after business hours, but the matter will not wait and the size of the loan will probably compensate you for any inconvenience caused. I cannot come and see you owing to indisposition.

Yours faithfully
EDWARD DERRINGTON

P.S.—Please burn this note when read, as it contains my fictitious name combined with my proper (temporary) address and might thus lead to my identification if it fell into other hands.

"Holm Lea again," exclaimed Drury. "No doubt about your first shot being a bull's-eye, Ridley. Notice the date? The day before Rosenbaum rang you up. It pretty well proves that Levinsky went there that night. The point is, who the devil is Derrington?"

"He's the man whose I.O.U. was missing from Levinsky's safe."

"Yes, yes, I know that. Therefore he's probably the man who burgled the aforesaid safe. But I don't mean that. I mean how is he mixed up in this? Derrington lived at Holm Lea. So did Laidlaw. Derrington was ill, according to this letter, so was Laidlaw—very ill. There must have been two invalids in the house, but Osborne didn't say anything about a second man, and he certainly wasn't there the next day when your man called to make inquiries. Who did call, by the way?"

"Roberts."

"Well, Roberts went all over the house when Mrs. Laidlaw fainted, and if there had been a second man there he would have seen him. So either Derrington was well enough to leave the house next morning or——"

"Or what?" asked Ridley.

"Derrington and Laidlaw are one and the same individual."

"Are?"

"Were, I should say. Of course, if Derrington was Laidlaw, he's dead and out of it altogether as far as we are concerned. We shall have to leave that point unsettled for the present. We don't know enough about it."

"This letter is not much good, then?"

"Oh, yes, it is. It tells us where Levinsky was on the night he disappeared. It brings Holm Lea into the limelight again."

"Of course it does. I was almost forgetting that we were looking for Levinsky. It's time I went to bed."

"My fault. I put you off with a complicated argument about Derrington and Laidlaw."

"It was a bit difficult to follow," admitted Ridley with a yawn.

"Yes; all the more so because it went round and round in a circle and came to nothing at the end of it. Anyhow, it's quite clear that our next job is to find out whether Levinsky left any traces of his visit to the house. You'll have to let your work go for another day, Ridley. I'm going to Birmingham, remember."

"I'll arrange for a search-warrant and have a good look round while she is away. We ought to get hold of something definite between us."

"We need it."

"We do, indeed. I wonder whether—— It looks very much as if Derrington was Laidlaw, doesn't it? If he is, then that can't be his finger-print on the safe, because he was dying at the time it was made. We know it wasn't Tomlin's, so it must be Levinsky's."

"My dear man, who's arguing in a circle now? Why should Levinsky steal his own address book and do a bunk with it?"

"Why should anybody do anything?"

Inspector Ridley's temper was becoming a little frayed. It was all very well for the man from Scotland Yard. The more complicated the case the better for him when it was solved. It was his job and he could spend his whole time and energy on it as long as his superiors would let him. Ridley had also been enthusiastic at first, building dreams of promotion on the hope of a rapid solution. But as the days went by the end seemed further away than ever. His routine work was getting into a chaotic condition; six men of the not overmanned Southbourne Constabulary had been taken off their ordinary duties on account of it and, to crown all, the Chief Constable was dropping hints that progress was disappointing. Ridley would not have minded this if there had been anything to go upon. But he was thoroughly tired of the mass of contradictions and uncertainties which their work had brought to light. He got up to go and as he did so heard Drury say, half to himself:

"Derrington can't be Laidlaw, because Derrington arranged a business interview for

that night, and Osborne definitely said that Laidlaw was unconscious every time he saw him. That settles it; there must be another man in it, Ridley."

"Oh, hell!" said Ridley. "He'll have to wait till morning, then. I'm going to bed now."

Next morning he felt better. The combined effects of a good night's sleep, an excellent breakfast and the prospect of definite progress banished the clouds of the night before and restored his energy and good temper. Mrs. Laidlaw's departure was the signal for strenuous activity. Drury and Purley were waiting in a taxi about half-way down Castle Road, and as soon as she came under their observation Roberts, who was following her, turned back and joined Ridley at the public-house corner. Together they entered the house through a cellar window, while two men in plain clothes took up their position at convenient vantage places outside the gates in order to give warning if the widow returned.

It is true that the warrant legalized Ridley's position, so that in one sense it would not have mattered if he had been found in the house, but it was highly desirable that the whole affair should be kept secret for the present, so that the elusive Derrington should be lulled into a false

sense of security, and so that Mrs. Laidlaw's suspicions should not be aroused until the nature of her business in Birmingham was cleared up. In all probability they had the whole day before them—perhaps two days—so there was ample time to search thoroughly. Ridley turned his attention first to a small desk in the dining-room and very soon found some useful information. In one of the drawers were several letters addressed to Laidlaw which had been forwarded from his house—Holly Grove, Barhaven. There was also another from the same address which was signed "D. Freeman." It was written on notepaper headed with a telephone number and surgery hours and was plainly from the locum, asking for various details of information connected with the practice.

Meanwhile Roberts began his part of the search in the backyard, in order to extract from the dustbins any information they contained before they were emptied. He returned with his hands filthy and his face jubilant.

"Found these, sir," he said, producing several pieces of broken glass, some of which were evidently fragments of a spectacle lens or lenses, and some of which had formed part of a tube with engraved markings on it.

"Good. Take the kitchen next," replied

Ridley. "Give me that cigarette box out of the waste-paper-basket to put them in."

The remainder of the search was disappointing, the only other unexplained item being a broken block of transparent material, not unlike candle grease, which was discovered under the kitchen sink behind the usual collection of floor-cloths and cleaning powders.

There were only two opticians in the town, and to the nearest one Ridley took the broken fragments when they left the house. He spread them out on the counter in front of him.

"Is it possible to identify them?" he inquired.

"It may be," replied the optician. "But it will be a troublesome job. Is it anything important?"

"Yes."

The man began to arrange the broken pieces on the counter, and in a few minutes fitted them together to make two nearly complete lenses. He next produced a small watch-like instrument from his waistcoat pocket.

"I can measure the curvature of the lenses with this," he said, "and get at the formula from which they were made. If it happens to be a very ordinary one I shall not be able to tell you any more, but if it is an uncommon one it

would be possible to find out from my books if any of my customers use that particular sight. It would mean looking through several thousand prescriptions, though."

The optician looked at Ridley over the top of his glasses, hopefully expecting him to say that it wasn't worth troubling about. There was no response, so he applied the lens measurer to the broken fragments and wrote cabalistic signs on a piece of paper.

"Minus four point five dioptres spherical, minus two point five cylinder axis vertical," he concluded.

"Very nice," remarked Ridley. "What the devil does it mean?"

"It means that the lenses are fairly distinctive and belong to somebody with pretty severe short-sightedness and some astigmatism. I've worked out the full formula for both of them and, if they have been bought here, it ought to be possible to find out who they belong to." He sighed at the gloomy prospect before him.

"I don't think I need trouble you to search your books," said Ridley. "Not yet, at any rate. I can give you some help now. Have you ever supplied any glasses to anybody called Levinsky, and, if so, to what formula?"

The optician brightened visibly.

"I can tell you that in a few minutes, sir," he said, disappearing behind a screen.

There was a sound of ledger leaves being turned over and then he emerged again.

"Never had a customer of that name, sir."

"Thanks very much. I'll go along to the other opticians and see if I have any luck there. If I haven't I may want to look through your books, but I'll let you know."

"Right you are, sir. Do you want these bits?"

"I do," said Ridley grimly. "This isn't just a replacement of a broken pair. It may be a hanging job for somebody."

The formula was next taken to the rival shop with much more satisfactory results. In a few minutes' time Ridley was informed that the lenses were exactly similar to some supplied to Mr. Levinsky about eighteen months before.

"Good," he said with heart-felt satisfaction. "That's something definite at last. Now what about this? Is it anything in your line?"

Ridley put away his precious lenses and produced the broken glass tube. Mr. Dawson happened to be a pharmaceutical chemist as well as an optician and he looked at it with an air of familiarity.

"Yes," he said. "It is part of a serum syringe barrel. Like this, only bigger," and he

fetched a small glass syringe from a drawer. "You can get them at any wholesale houses or surgical instrument makers. We don't keep them. We only stock a few of the small hypodermics."

"Is it a usual thing to find in a doctor's house?"

"Oh, yes. They all have them. They use them for injecting diphtheria antitoxin."

"What's that stuff inside it?"

"I couldn't say for certain. It looks like paraffin wax that has been melted."

"Same sort of stuff as this?" queried Ridley, taking out the cake of transparent material found under the sink.

"Yes, I think so."

"What is it doing in the syringe? Doctors don't treat any diseases by injecting wax, do they?"

"Not that I know of. Paraffin wax is used for applying to burns sometimes, but not in a syringe. Oh, I've got it. They use it in blood transfusion. The syringe is washed out in melted wax, which sets and forms a solid lining and prevents the blood coagulating while it is being transferred from the donor to the recipient."

The chemist, after the manner of his kind, enjoyed impressing the laity by the use of

technical terms, but his erudition fell upon inattentive ears this time, for his listener was thinking of something else. This explanation connected the cake of wax and the syringe in an intelligible manner, but the explanation itself was inexplicable, and Ridley racked his brains in vain to make sense of it.

If this was a Father Brown story it would here be described how the inspector gazed over a bleak hill-top, rounded like a grinning and sightless skull and covered with purple heather, which encroached upon its stark nudity like a fungus growth of decay and death. A dark storm-cloud would be approaching, with bank upon bank of gloomy caverns of inky blackness lit by the lurid glare of lightning flashes. In this atmosphere of evil his thoughts would turn to vampires and werwolves, those monstrous Undead rejected of heaven and hell alike, until a casual remark by Father Brown would reveal the key to the whole mystery. But the unromantic and unchestertonian truth must be told—in real life and in actual fact Ridley looked out of the shop door, past the serried ranks of quack medicines and baby foods, on to a cobbled street lighted by electricity and sludgy with drizzling rain. And instead of the illuminating remark of the *Deus ex machina* of the novelist there was merely the

sound of a man spitting noisily on the pavement.

If it was a Sherlock Holmes adventure Ridley would have been able to give a complete description of the money-lender's whereabouts from the appearance of his spectacle lenses and, stimulated by fatuous questions from the ineffable Watson, would have evolved an incredibly simple explanation of the wax-lined syringe.

Ridley was neither Father Brown nor Sherlock Holmes, but merely a hardworking and efficient police officer. He was equipped with his full share of brains and imagination, but lacked the omniscience of the detective of fiction, whose creator has the advantage of being able to build up his story backwards.

"Damn this case!" he thought as he left the shop. "Nothing fits in anywhere. Even when we do get hold of one definite fact it has two or three riddles tied on to it."

Drury returned about nine o'clock that night, having left Purley to co-operate with the Birmingham police. He listened to his colleague's account of his doings with great satisfaction.

"Progress in the right direction, even if slow," he chuckled. "I've no idea what the wax and syringe mean—if they mean anything—but those

lenses are certainly valuable. There's not much doubt about Levinsky going to Holm Lea now. And if he left a pair of broken glasses there it makes one wonder what happened to him. No signs of a struggle, I suppose ? "

" None at all. The whole house was very tidy and well-kept. The only thing upset in the whole place was a box of gramophone needles in the bedroom."

" I haven't been wasting my time to-day, either. Kate is a man, Ridley ! At least our widow said she was going to meet Kate, and she met a man. Went off to an hotel with him too. What do you think of that ? "

" I don't think she is a very nice woman to know," was the reply. " She might at least have waited till the dear departed's grave was filled in ! What else did you find out ? "

" I interviewed the manager, and he told me that the man had been staying there since the 28th——"

" The 28th," interrupted Ridley. " That was the morning of the disappearance. Remember what you said about Derrington last night ? "

" I said several things about him. Which particular one are you referring to ? "

" You came to the conclusion that he must be a separate individual and that he must have left

Holm Lea on the morning of the 28th. It's quite likely, then, that he did leave and that he is the Birmingham man."

" Yes, it is. In that case he is probably the *tertium quid*."

" The what ? "

" The co-respondent."

" You think that Mrs. Laidlaw murdered her husband so that she could go away with Derrington ? "

" No, I'm not suggesting that. Heaven preserve us from any more complications ! Laidlaw's death was straightforward enough, but I do think it fitted in rather well with Mrs. Laidlaw's plans to go off with another man indecently quickly."

" What has it all got to do with Levinsky ? How does he come into it ? "

" Search me. I don't know. Every time you start theorizing on this case it either leads you right away from Levinsky or else brings you back to where you started. What we want is more facts, and the next fact we must find out is who this man really is. He seems to be pretty thick with the widow, so he may be a neighbour of hers. Where did the Laidlaws come from ? Their permanent address, I mean."

"I got it to-day from the house. He was in practice in Barhaven."

"Ring up the police there and ask them to send somebody over to Birmingham who knows everybody in Barhaven. It's only a small town. Tell them I shall be coming by the 8.50 train. It's a shot in the dark, but it may come off."

The next morning Sergeant Jackson of the Yorkshire (South Riding) Police met Drury at the appointed time at Snow Hill Station, Birmingham. They went to the hotel together and chose a shaded seat in the lounge.

"Very sad about Dr. Laidlaw, sir," observed the sergeant.

"Very," replied Drury conventionally. Never having seen the dead man he made no effort to simulate an emotion which he did not feel.

"I knew him well," continued Jackson. "He was a big, strong chap and I was very surprised to hear that he was dead."

"Do you know his friends as well?"

"He hadn't many, sir. He and his wife kept pretty well to themselves. So I don't know whether I shall be able to help you or not."

"Keep well back out of sight, anyway," advised Drury, "or you certainly won't be able to help. It doesn't matter about me because neither of them have ever seen me. I'm going to find out if they are in."

He went across to the letter-rack near the office and scanned the letters stuck in the tapes. While he was thus occupied a man standing near went up to him and borrowed a match. Drury nodded as his box was returned, continued his scrutiny of the rack and presently rejoined his companion.

"Purley says they are upstairs, so we've got to stop here and have a good look at them. I don't think we could find a better place. He is going to knock the ashes out of his pipe when they come, so you keep this paper handy and hide behind it when he gives the signal. And, whatever you do, keep quiet till they are out of range or you might give the whole show away. Mrs. Laidlaw knows you by sight, of course?"

"I should think so, sir. I've never spoken to her, but I've seen her hundreds of times, and she has probably seen me."

After about ten minutes' waiting Detective Officer Purley, who had now altogether lost his former appearance of seediness and was an inconspicuous and respectable figure in a serge

suit, got into difficulties with his pipe. He blew violently through it, scraped it with a penknife and finally knocked out the ashes into a plant pot. As he did so a man and a woman came down the staircase into the lounge. The man appeared to be about thirty-five years old. His hair was already beginning to get thin on the top, but it showed no signs of greyness. His complexion was fiery red and he was slightly—very slightly—inclined to stoutness. Mrs. Laidlaw, clad in black, unrelieved by any touch of colour, looked extremely well. The severe plainness of her costume suited her beautiful regular features and softened the slight hardness of her mouth. They crossed the lounge laughing and talking, passed the seat in the alcove and selected arm-chairs a few yards away. Drury had his back to them and contented himself with watching the sergeant, great as the temptation was to turn round. He saw him peer cautiously under the edge of the outstretched paper, at first for a moment only, then, as he realized that he was in the shade and almost invisible, more boldly. His expression gradually changed from a mere stare of intense curiosity to an amusing mixture of surprise and bewilderment, and lastly to blank incredulity. The paper dropped suddenly, and Drury guessed that one of the pair had

turned round. Presently it lifted again and the sergeant, after looking helplessly at his companion, resumed his scrutiny.

The inspector was at a loss to interpret the varying expressions which succeeded each other so quickly on Jackson's rubicund face. At first he thought that his plan had failed, but the second reconnaissance was so prolonged that his spirits began to rise again. Surely if it had been an absolute stranger one glance would have sufficed. The doubt in the Barhaven man's mind was hopeful.

Mrs. Laidlaw and her escort finished their cigarettes and rose to go. The illustrated paper again hid the face of the watcher in the alcove, and Detective Officer Purley put his pipe in his pocket and consulted the barometer, which was conveniently near the door. Drury leaned forward to strike a match on his boot and whispered as he did so :

" Keep that paper up. They are coming this way." He struck the match and lit his pipe. " All clear now."

As the swing-doors ceased revolving, Sergeant Jackson shot out from cover like an apoplectic marionette.

" Sir, you'll think I've gone dotty when I tell you who it is. I couldn't be sure of him at

first because of his dyed hair and because it seemed so utterly impossible——"

"Who *is* it?" interrupted his fermenting superior.

"But when I heard him speak I nearly fell out of the chair," continued the sergeant, stolidly refusing to be hurried. "I had another good look at him and I'm absolutely certain. I know him far too well to be mistaken. It can't be him—but it is!"

"Damn it, man! Who?" exploded Drury.

"Dr. Laidlaw himself!" was the astounding reply.

CHAPTER VII

"THE POLICE HAVE MADE AN ARREST"

DRURY stared at the sergeant, who was crimson with excitement, and then at the empty glasses on the table between them. One bottle of light lager ought not to have any appreciable effect on a fourteen-stone man, and yet—— An explanation entered his mind.

"Had Dr. Laidlaw a brother?" he asked.

"No, sir, and even if he had this wasn't him. It was the doctor himself. We've lived in the same town together for eight years and I've seen him nearly every day. I see more of him than the other doctors because he is the police surgeon. I know it isn't possible, but I know I'm right!"

"But you said yourself that you were not sure at first and that you think he is disguised."

"He hasn't altered his appearance much, and I should never have hesitated for a second if I hadn't heard that he was dead. I'd swear to him in the witness-box, sir," concluded Jackson earnestly.

"Well, sergeant, if you are right everybody

else is very, very wrong. Still——" Drury stopped abruptly as a sudden thought struck him, dazzling in the intensity of the light it threw upon the obscurity of the case. "If you are right," he continued slowly, "you've helped to unravel a horrible, cold-blooded crime, and I'll apologize for doubting you. Laidlaw is dead and you say that he is alive—I thought it was ridiculous at first, but I see now that it explains a whole lot of things. In fact, it is the easiest and most likely solution of the whole problem. I must get through to Ridley at once. He'd like to hear this."

He waited ten minutes for his trunk call, and each minute seemed a century.

"Hello!" said the instrument at last. "Oh, is that you, Drury? Any news?"

"Lots," replied Drury happily, bolting the door of the telephone cabinet. "I want you to apply for an order to exhume Laidlaw's body. How's that, umpire, for a start?"

He heard a whistle of amazement from the other end of the wire.

"Good Lord! Laidlaw? What for?"

"I thought that would shake you up a bit! Things are moving now with a vengeance. You admit that Laidlaw is dead and buried, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"And that Levinsky has disappeared?"

"My dear man, considering that we've been looking for him all this time——"

"Strikes you as rather a superfluous remark, eh? Well, suppose that Laidlaw isn't dead."

A stupefied silence prevailed.

"But is here with his wife. Wife, not widow, Ridley. The sergeant says he can swear to him. That makes a grave too many in your cemetery, doesn't it? *And* there's somebody missing. Putting two and two together——"

"You mean that Levinsky——?"

"Might be occupying that coffin? Precisely. You've got me, Steve. In fact I think we might safely predict that he *is* in that coffin. Seems reasonable enough, doesn't it? Not at all a bad way of disposing of a body, either. Put it in a cemetery with a doctor's certificate and a nice respectable funeral all complete—there's a touch of genius about it that appeals to me. Reminds me of the late Mr. Barnes."

"Barnes? Who was he?" asked Ridley.

"A gentleman in Sussex who murdered his wife and a friend of hers who was a bit too friendly for his liking. He had the nerve to take lodgings next door to the police-station in a town about two miles away, and he lived there six weeks while we were going through the whole

country with a fine-toothed comb and watching all the ports."

"I'll see about that order at once. What about Laidlaw?"

"Which one? The quick or the dead?"

"Your Laidlaw. The Birmingham one. Don't let him be too quick for you."

"We've got him well covered, but the sooner he's inside the better. We shall have to wait a bit, though. The Barhaven man seems very certain, but under the circumstances we must be absolutely positive. Think what a blazing fool I should look if I arrested this chap and found that Laidlaw really was dead! No, we can't rely on one man's evidence. I shall go for his finger-prints next. If we are on the right track at last they ought to be the same as those on the safe. At any rate Derrington is the only man likely to pinch the address book, and it seems pretty certain now that Derrington and Laidlaw are one and the same."

"They seem to be. I remember we thought that once before and came to the conclusion that they couldn't be, because Laidlaw was dying when Derrington had his interview with Levinsky. But if Laidlaw wasn't dying it simplifies things. I wonder what happened to the real invalid—the one Dr. Osborne saw?"

"I've no idea, but it doesn't matter much at this stage. If the prints are the same we can arrest him for burglary and hold him on that charge till the experts weigh in with their post-mortem evidence and the analysis. It would be interesting to know what did happen to the invalid, all the same. We are assuming that Laidlaw disposed of the corpse very nicely and conveniently by burying it in his own name, but, dash it all! it is almost as difficult to dispose of a man with meningitis as it is to get rid of a body."

"Perhaps he used—— No, of course he couldn't."

"Couldn't what?"

"It suddenly struck me that he might have drugged Levinsky and used him as the decoy to get the certificate before he finished him off. But that's out of the question because Levinsky was going about his business as usual while Osborne was attending the invalid."

The problem was left unsolved and Drury rang off and betook himself to the hotel office, which opened off the lounge. He disclosed his identity to Mr. Moore, the manager, and asked him for an interview with the lounge waiter.

"Nothing wrong with him, is there?" asked the manager anxiously. "He came to me with very good references."

"Nothing at all," Drury reassured him. "I only want him to do something for me."

The waiter, an intelligent-looking man called Wilson, arrived in a few minutes.

"Now," began Drury, looking first at him and then at the manager, "I want you both to keep this quiet. Don't say a word about it to anybody or it will spoil everything. You know Mrs. Laidlaw, who arrived yesterday?"

"Yes."

"And that man with her?"

"Her brother?" queried Mr. Moore.

"Oh, supposed to be her brother, is he? Well, we believe him to be her husband and suspect him of burglary, and probably of murder as well. I want you to help me. If you do and I have to arrest them, I will do it as quietly as possible and avoid any scandal."

The manager, who was also the owner of the hotel, was horrified and only too anxious to help. The promise to avoid disturbance appealed to him strongly. Long experience had taught Drury to word his requests so that they were very seldom refused.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Mr. Moore eagerly.

"From you I only want permission to borrow the services of your waiter for a short time. I

would ask you personally for help, but it is a waiter's job and we must avoid arousing suspicion. I shall not be able to arrest them for twelve hours at least, so, except to carry out what I am just going to tell you, I don't want you to take any notice of them apart from treating them as ordinary guests. Don't watch them or stare at them."

"What if they bolt in the meantime?"

"They won't try to unless they suspect something, and they won't suspect anything if you do what I tell you. If they do leave they will be followed. A man has been watching the front door and another the back ever since Mrs. Laidlaw came here."

"Dear me! Have they really? And I never noticed them!"

"You were not meant to," smiled Drury. "They would have been very annoyed if you had. Does this man have drinks in the lounge, by the way?"

Mr. Moore looked inquiringly at the waiter.

"He has coffee after dinner, sir," said the latter doubtfully.

Drury laughed. "Coffee is a drink for our purposes. Have you a polished metal sugar basin and milk jug?"

"Yes," replied Moore, "all ours are metal.

They cut down the breakage bill. Do you want some ? "

" Please. Find the newest ones you've got and let me have a look at them. Without scratches if possible. And a clean duster, please."

The waiter was about to hurry off on his errand when his employer stopped him and produced a bunch of keys from his pocket.

" Go to the store-room, Wilson, and get some new ones. All those in use are scratched."

Wilson returned with a Britannia metal basin and jug, new and shiny in their tissue paper wrappings.

" Those will do very nicely, thanks. May I borrow these for a moment ? "

Drury put on the gloves which were lying in the manager's hat and carefully cleaned the basin and jug with the duster.

" Now put some milk and sugar in them, but don't touch them. When this man orders his coffee put a pair of cotton gloves on and take him these. I'll be there to see that you don't forget the gloves. Put them down at the far side of the table so that he will have to pick them up to offer them to the lady. Hang about tidying up papers or doing something in the lounge until you see him touch them, and then bring them back to me straight away. You can say something about being short of sugar-basins if you like. The basin is the most important. I don't suppose the milk jug will be much good as it has a handle on it. Still, put it down with the handle away from him. Understand all that ? "

" Yes, sir. You want his finger-prints, and you don't want anybody else's mixed up with them."

" That's right. While we we are about it we might as well have a few glasses ready polished in case he changes his drink and doesn't have coffee to-night."

" Right you are, sir. I'll get you some."

A complete outfit of prepared glasses was placed on the tray together with the basin and jug and the whole baited trap taken to the pantry by Wilson. Drury stayed with it during dinner and frustrated the efforts of several waiters to remove it. To his delight he found that a small service window opened out of the pantry, through which a good view of the lounge could be obtained. To make his presence more natural he took off his coat and put on a green baize apron borrowed from the boots. Sergeant Jackson was stowed away in Mr. Moore's private room, in order to be near at hand yet invisible. He was intensely anxious to watch the little play that had been so carefully staged, but Drury was inflexible.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but one glimpse of you would spoil everything. You must keep right out of it at present. After all you are not missing much. Any fool can get finger-prints from a person who isn't on the look out. The really important part of the job was your spotting the man."

Thus he consoled the sergeant, who, in spite of his disappointment at being banished from the lounge, was enjoying every minute of this heaven-sent break in his routine work. Crime, apart from the militant forms of alcoholism, did not often visit the dingy but respectable neighbourhood of Barhaven.

Drury occupied his time by pretending to clean silver until Mrs. Laidlaw and her companion emerged from the dining-room. After strolling aimlessly about for a few minutes they sat down and ordered coffee. His ally, the waiter, brought his tray into the pantry and collected the prepared basin and jug. He even remembered to put on his gloves without being reminded. The remainder of the scheme worked without a hitch, as might have been expected from its simplicity. Mrs. Laidlaw's escort half rose in his chair to reach the sugar from the other side of the table, and shortly afterwards the waiter, who was discreetly emptying ash-trays

and arranging papers at the other end of the lounge, returned to the table with the peculiar half-running walk of his profession and removed the basin. Being an intelligent man he had observed that the guest had gripped the basin firmly when lifting it, and also that the lady had not touched it at all. He therefore had sufficient initiative to ignore the milk-jug, rightly judging that the inspector had got what he wanted on the basin. He pushed it through the pantry window into the waiting hands of the inspector, who received it as tenderly as if it was porcelain of the Ming period.

The latter then joined the sergeant in the manager's room, and together they ate their deferred dinner. It was rather a hurried meal, and at half-past eight Drury caught the London train.

A telegram had preceded him, and when he arrived at Scotland Yard with his precious parcel his Chief was still there, despite the lateness of the hour.

While the photographers were dealing with the sugar-basin and the finger-print experts comparing the results, he recounted the whole story to his superior, who agreed that, at present, nothing should be said about Laidlaw.

The report came in at last, and Drury reconciled

himself to spending the rest of the night in the train. He got what sleep he could and arrived at the hotel at eight o'clock in the morning. Purley was again on duty, having relieved the night man a few minutes before. He was not in the lounge at this hour, but in conversation with a newspaper man in the street. Drury went inside and was occupied for the next ten minutes in conferring with the manager. In order to fulfil his promise that the arrest should be carried out as quietly as possible, Drury proposed to interview the wanted man in the office, and to this end he gave certain instructions.

At last the man for whom they were waiting came downstairs and strolled to the front door, feeling in his pocket for a coin to buy a paper. The office door opened and Mr. Moore emerged, somewhat damp about the forehead. Crossing the lounge, he approached the man whom the finger-prints had proclaimed to be Derrington.

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" he said. "I find I shall have to change your bedroom after to-night owing to the painters starting work there to-morrow, and I should like you to choose one that suits you. If you care to come into the office for a moment——"

Carefully as Mr. Moore had been coached in

his part, and anxious as he was to carry it off successfully for the sake of his hotel's reputation —the most precious possession of the licensed victualler—his acting was not a success. Whether his manner was too nervous, or whether he looked with too curious an eye upon the suspected man, Drury never knew, but something went wrong. Derrington's easy assurance dropped from him like a discarded garment and a look of horrified apprehension took its place. The colour faded from his congested cheeks and was replaced by a sickly pallor. Pushing past Moore with such unexpected violence as to make him stagger backwards, he reached the door with a bound and was gone. Even the watchful Purley, who was now standing close by, reading his morning paper, was taken by surprise, so certain was he that his part in the proceedings was nearly over. For a fraction of a second there was an astonished silence, only broken by the noise of rapidly receding footsteps on the pavement outside, and then came a loud crash from the office as a swivel chair went over backwards. Drury, who had been sitting in it and watching the whole scene, charged through the lounge at full speed and out into the street, leaving the revolving doors swinging furiously behind him.

Purley, who was handicapped by having to

stop their rotation before he could get through, toiled gallantly in the rear.

The flying figure of the fugitive was about fifty yards ahead and he was running at an astonishing speed. The streets were unusually deserted, and Drury realized that he would have to rely on his own efforts. He ran until his breath came in short gasps and an intolerable pain in his side proclaimed the liberties he was taking with his age. The veins in his neck felt as though they were about to burst, and his heart was drumming and pounding in his ears like a hammer, but he still kept on. Nothing short of complete collapse could have made him give up the chase when success was so near.

Sub-consciously he wondered how the plump and plethoric Derrington, whose advantage in years was more than neutralized by his vast inferiority in physical condition, could set such a pace. To a person not engaged in violent exertion and therefore able to think clearly, the problem presents no difficulties; Drury was running for his professional reputation, it is true, but the other man was running for his liberty and knew it. It was impossible, however, for fully-clothed, middle-aged men to keep up the speed of the first furious rush, whatever their

previous training and whatever the stimulus. Drury could feel an iron band encircling his chest and every step he took screwed it tighter and tighter. The thudding of his feet and the loud beating of his overtaxed heart formed an irregular rhythm in his ears. First the footsteps would get in advance of the heart-beats and then they would lag behind, until the whole universe seemed full of painful sound. His pace grew slower, but he was not losing ground. Derrington was still in sight, labouring heavily and not far enough ahead to be able to turn a corner without being seen.

For half a mile the chase continued, until suddenly the fugitive turned into the station yard, dived through a line of waiting taxis and disappeared into the station. At that moment the sound of a departure bell was followed by the blast of a guard's whistle and the deafening shriek of escaping steam. At the beginning of the chase, when Drury could have shouted to a passer-by or policeman for assistance, the streets had been deserted. Now, in the busy station yard, when help was at hand, shouting was physically impossible and the taxi-drivers, unaware of anything out of the ordinary, merely saw two men running to catch a train and speculated idly on their chances of success.

"Gosh!" remarked one of them, spitting with precision on to the inner tube in his hand and listening hopefully for bubbles. "Them chaps is in a hurry!"

"Serves 'em right for not taking a taxi," replied his neighbour, who was polishing his side lamps. "Buck up, mister, or you'll miss it!" he added encouragingly as the second runner passed him.

Drury rushed past the booking-office on to the main platform just as the train began to move. Derrington was nowhere to be seen, and there was no time for elaborate speculations as to whether he was in the train or not. Drury staggered across the platform towards the train without a moment's hesitation, doing automatically what the arm-chair detective would have done by inductive reasoning. No sane man, in the stress and strain of a close pursuit, could deliberately throw away the chance of escape offered by a moving train which he might reasonably expect his pursuer to miss, and coolly hide in a waiting-room. So runs the theory of what Drury did by instinct.

The Scotland Yard man disregarded the protesting shouts of the porters and flung himself at the last carriage as it went past him. A violent struggle with the handle and he fell into

the compartment absolutely exhausted. Sick and dizzy, he lay on the seat praying for death, too far gone to hear the remarks of the incensed ticket collector who slammed his open door to with quite unnecessary violence. In a short time, however, he revived sufficiently to think, if not to be comfortable, and rose to his feet unsteadily. Lowering the window with trembling hands, he leaned out in order to get some air into his aching lungs, and as he did so he looked back at the station. The train was moving slowly, the engine labouring as though on an uphill gradient, and the platform was still only a couple of hundred yards away. He saw Purley emerge from the booking-office, cross the platform and jump down on to the rails. Drury ran across to the other window to get a better view, and as the tail of the train swung round a gentle curve he saw Purley cross the track to something on the other side. He was just able to see, before the guard's van swung back into the line of vision, that it was the body of a man lying in a crumpled heap. He jumped for the communication cord and pulled it violently. For a few seconds nothing happened, and then with a grinding of brakes the train began to slow down. By the time it stopped he had regained enough breath to explain to the guard what had happened, and at

his request the train backed slowly towards the platform. Purley looked up and saw his superior leaning out of the window.

"All right, sir. This is him."

Drury thanked the guard and got out, while the train went on its way with heads protruding from every window. The only regret of the guard and engine-driver was that they could not stop to see the rest of the drama.

It was obvious what had happened. The hunted man had seen his pursuer board the train a few seconds behind him and, spurred by the most powerful of all inducements, the instinct of self-preservation, had been able to rouse himself to one more effort at the time of greatest exhaustion when the inspector was lying helpless in his compartment. He had opened the door at the opposite side and stepped out on to the line, hoping thus to get clear while his follower was rapidly being carried away from him. He was not in a condition, however, to alight from even a slowly moving train, and he had collapsed in a heap almost under the eyes of his second pursuer, of whose existence he was ignorant. Drury approached the sweating, mud-splashed men somewhat unsteadily.

"Edward Derrington," he said, still gasping for breath, "I arrest you on a charge of burglary

at Levinsky and Co.'s offices on the night of the 27th or 28th of April, and I have to warn you"—here the inspector was compelled to sit down on a pile of sleepers—"that any statement you may make may be used in evidence at your trial."

THE MISSING MONEY-LENDER

BY

W. STANLEY SYKES

LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

First published in 1931

Made and Printed in Great Britain by
Tonbridge Printers Peach Hall Works Tonbridge

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE DEATH OF DR. LAIDLAW	1
II.	WHERE IS MR. LEVINSKY?	22
III.	MR. TOMLIN PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT	67
IV.	THE STOLEN ADDRESS BOOK	77
V.	A DISCREPANCY IN THE TIME-TABLE	91
VI.	THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD	118
VII.	"THE POLICE HAVE MADE AN ARREST"	143
VIII.	THE EXHUMATION	162
IX.	A QUESTION OF IDENTITY	173
X.	THE INQUEST	187
XI.	THE OPINION OF THE FOURTH ESTATE	208
XII.	THE PRISONER MAKES A STATEMENT	214
XIII.	HOLM LEA AGAIN	231
XIV.	THE POISON THAT IS NOT A POISON	249
XV.	THE RE-EXAMINATION	268
XVI.	AN ANALYTICAL LOOPHOLE	287
XVII.	THE OFFICE BOY'S REVENGE	299
XVIII.	THE THIRD ANALYSIS	306
XIX.	THE BEGINNING OF THE END	319

CHAPTER VIII

THE EXHUMATION

HALF an hour after midnight a group of men assembled at the gates of the Southbourne Burial Ground, which were opened for them by the Cemetery superintendent. Two of their number, uniformed constables, were detailed to remain outside and patrol the boundary railings in order to move on any inquisitive spectators. The others entered and the superintendent, after closing and locking the gates, led the little procession to his office. It consisted of the Chief Constable, the two inspectors, a sergeant and a constable and three civilians, two of whom were grave-diggers. The third was Alderman Arthur Singleton, described on his bill-heads as grocer and Italian warehouseman, a short, tubby little man who disguised his absence of chin quite efficiently with a straggling beard. His incongruous presence was due to the fact that he was Chairman of the Cemetery Sub-committee of the Southbourne Town Council.

The Chief Constable produced a long envelope from his pocket and extracted an official looking document, which he laid on the table.

"That is the Home Office order, Mr. Singleton, if you would care to see it."

The little grocer adjusted his spectacles and read it, too interested or too awed by his surroundings to notice that the Cemetery superintendent was also reading it over his shoulder and breathing an aroma of fish and chips on to the back of his neck.

"Have you got everything ready?" asked the Chief Constable.

"I think so, sir," replied the superintendent, straightening up with a jerk. "I rigged up the screen this evening before dark and the other things are in a hand-cart outside."

He handed a hurricane petrol lamp to the Chief and took another himself. The little company filed out of the office, led by the lamp-bearers, and halted for a moment at the tool-shed to allow the grave-diggers to get the cart. They then went on their way down the main central path of the Cemetery.

It was a strange scene. The overlapping circles of brilliant light thrown out by the petrol lamps intensified the surrounding blackness of the moonless night. The tramp of heavy boots and

the rattling of the iron-tyred cart wheels on the asphalt sounded thunderously loud in the stillness, and Mr. Singleton kept as near the lamps as possible.

Two years ago the alderman had consulted his doctor and overwhelmed that long-suffering individual with a torrent of weird and wonderful symptoms, none of which bore any relation to any known disease. Consequently, at the close of the consultation, when the little grocer asked in an anxious tone, "Is it nerves, doctor?" he was met with an absent-minded "Yes" in reply. The doctor was at the time endeavouring to grope his way out of the mental fog induced by his verbose patient's flow of complaints and wondering how to tell him without offence that there was nothing the matter. Unlike Dr. Osborne, he was wholly dependent on his practice for his living, and therefore had to be much more careful to use the soft answer that turneth away wrath. Mr. Singleton naturally did not notice his preoccupation and accepted the reply as an authoritative diagnosis. And very useful this diagnosis proved—to Mr. Singleton. He had ever since regarded himself as a privileged person and had contrived to persuade his wife to think the same. Domestic troubles and family disputes of every kind had to be concealed from him

lest his nerves should be affected. Maladies of this sort are generally permanent, unless the relatives have the wisdom to be unusually brutal and strong-minded.

Mr. Singleton was naturally polite, and so he began to explain his nerves to Inspector Drury as being the most interesting topic of conversation available. He met with very little encouragement—in fact, none at all—so he edged a little nearer to the Chief Constable and his lamp and began all over again, when he was interrupted by a wild and despairing shriek that ripped through the night like the wailing of a banshee.

"W-w-what's that?" he quavered, looking fearfully round at the stately procession of white marble headstones that moved incessantly into the circle of light and passed on into the darkness.

"Only a cat," replied the Cemetery superintendent. "Lots of them come here at night. We turn to the right here."

The procession turned off into a side path, no longer asphalted, and squelched through sticky mud and wet grass for about thirty yards until they came to a canvas screen built round the mound of a newly filled-in grave. Mr. Singleton and his unappreciated nerves relapsed into neglected silence. The grave-diggers unloaded their

tools and some coils of rope from the cart and followed the others inside the screen. They removed their coats, spat on their hands in an unemotional and business-like manner and began to earn their overtime without delay.

"You are quite certain that this is the right one?" queried the Chief Constable doubtfully, thinking of the apparently endless rows of tombstones that they had passed, all of them very much alike.

"Quite sure, sir. I put the screen up before it was dark. Here is a plan of the Cemetery, if you would like to look at it; but there is no possibility of a mistake. Dr. Laidlaw's grave is the only one in this row without a headstone. His has been ordered, but it will not be ready for another week."

"Right. If you are satisfied, I am. You've been here long enough to know your way about."

"Thirty-six years next August, sir, since I came," said the superintendent, with the pride of the almost-superannuated.

Meanwhile the grave-diggers went on with their work. The Chief knew better than to attempt to hurry their deliberate movements. The workman starts his job at half the pace of the impetuous amateur, but he generally gets there quicker in the end, and the steadily increasing pile of earth

by the grave-side showed signs of rapid progress. The earth, being recently disturbed, was easy to move, and the men gradually sank deeper and deeper into the trench.

The alderman felt happier now that the canvas screen shut out the rows of headstones from view. Its interior resembled a rough and roofless but well lighted tent and its appearance, in spite of the open grave in its centre, was less creepy than the dancing reflection of the lamps when they were being carried through the Cemetery itself. He almost forgot his nerves for the moment, being greatly concerned about his feet, which were growing colder and wetter every minute. To warm himself he took out his pipe and began to fill it.

"Consecrated ground, sir," whispered the superintendent.

"Ah, so it is. I had quite forgotten." Mr. Singleton put away his pipe, and his cheeks grew hot as he remembered how he had once ejected a small boy—who subsequently proved to be the superintendent's son—for reading a comic paper in that very cemetery. Meanwhile the diggers went on with their work. The superintendent estimated the depth with his eye and stifled a yawn.

"About another foot should do it," he ob-

served. "Steady on with that there pickaxe, George."

The Chief Constable turned to Ridley.

"Got the bottle ready?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Here it is"—and the local inspector produced a wide-mouthed stoppered bottle. Meanwhile the grave-diggers went on with their work. After another ten minutes one of the spades struck an unmistakably wooden object.

"Stop digging for a minute," directed Ridley, and lowered himself into the grave.

The men stood aside and wiped their foreheads. He shovelled up a trowelful of loose earth from the top of the coffin and deposited it in the bottle, which he corked and handed up to the Chief Constable. He then scrambled out and allowed the men to continue clearing the bottom of the excavation.

"What's that for?" whispered Mr. Singleton, who was feeling the strain of keeping quiet so long.

"If they find poison in the body," replied Ridley, "the defence might be that the poison had got into it from the surrounding earth, so this specimen will be analysed to exclude it."

"I see. I never thought of that."

"Are you ready down there?"

"All ready for lifting now, sir, if you'll pass the ropes down."

The two ropes were lowered to the men, who each passed one round an end of the coffin and worked it underneath. They then climbed out and helped the others to haul at the ropes. The load came up slowly, with frequent stops for the lifting party to shift their grip. When it was clear of the ground it was slid forward with an effort over the end of the grave until it rested on the grass. A few pieces of earth fell back into the grave and made dull splashes in the muddy water at the bottom. The Chief Constable held his lamp to the name-plate on the lid and turned away satisfied.

"Get it on to the hand-cart and take it to the mortuary straight-away," he ordered. "Leave a man in charge of it until the morning. Sir James Martin is going to do the post-mortem at eleven o'clock. You'd better get it identified before then, Ridley."

"Very good, sir."

After a few minutes' wait to allow the water to drain off the bottom of the coffin it was lifted on to the cart and covered with the canvas which had formed the screen round the grave. This was big enough and loose enough to hide its shape completely, and the sergeant and the constable set off with their burden.

It is a doubtful point whether it is compatible

with the dignity of an alderman and ex-mayor to escort a hand-cart containing a corpse through the streets of his own town at two o'clock in the morning, but Mr. Singleton did it. There was no alternative. The other members of the party were all going in the opposite direction, away from the aldermanic abode, and nothing on earth would have induced him to walk home alone. As he explained to the sergeant, his nerves . . .

The sergeant, being a local man, was compelled to listen to the recital which had been unceremoniously cut short by strangers of higher rank. The fact that he did not even yawn speaks volumes for the discipline of the Southbourne police force.

The constable kept his lonely watch at the mortuary, which was a brick shed at the back of the Public Baths, until the morning, and it was the longest night he had ever spent. The loneliness passed away at half-past seven, however, when another constable and an undertaker's man came to make the necessary preparations. At half-past eight Ridley arrived, accompanied by Mr. Isaac Levinsky and Rosenbaum.

"Go inside and see if they are ready," whispered Ridley to the constable. "If you wouldn't mind waiting a few minutes," he continued in a louder tone for the benefit of the other two, "I

will explain why I wanted you here this morning. We traced Mr. Levinsky to a certain house where a funeral had just taken place. The funeral purported to be that of a man whom we afterwards found to be alive. Mr. Levinsky was at this man's house on the night before he disappeared, and owing to this and to information received"—Ridley automatically relapsed into the jargon of the witness-box—"we feel certain that it is his body in that coffin. Pardon me for breaking it so abruptly, Mr. Levinsky, but I am not at liberty to tell you the whole story now."

"Are you sure it is my brother?" quavered Mr. Isaac Levinsky, pale as death.

"Practically, yes; I am afraid we are. All our work points to that conclusion, and all we want you to do is to identify the body as a matter of form for the inquest. After that you can rely on us to do everything possible to clear things up."

"How did he—die?" asked the little Jew, looking up at the big inspector in a pathetic, dog-like manner.

"We don't know yet, but we soon shall do."

Ridley would have liked to have told the little man the whole story in order to give him such slight comfort as it might afford, but it was essential that, for the present, the details should

be kept secret. The constable came out of the mortuary and saluted.

"Ready now, sir," he said.

Ridley conducted the now weeping relative into the building, led him up to the table and drew back the sheet which the constable had placed over it.

"Pull yourself together, Mr. Levinsky," he said. "One look is all that is necessary.

Mr. Levinsky's knees were trembling so that he could hardly stand. He peered anxiously and quickly at the calm still face and started back with a loud shriek which brought the constable from the door at the run.

"*That is not my brother*," gasped the Jew, and quietly fainted.

CHAPTER IX

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

RIDLEY and the constable picked up the unconscious man and carried him out into the fresh air. The latter fended off the well-meant but incompetent attentions of Rosenbaum, who was fussing round in agitated circles with his eyes popping out of his head, sat his burden on the ground and pushed the head well down between the knees, according to first-aid instructions. He then stood by and waited philosophically for his patient to recover.

Ridley shoved his cap to the back of his head and thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "Another snag!"

The colour slowly came back into Mr. Levinsky's face and he opened his eyes and smiled.

"He may still be alive, then," he said. "I believe I fainted for sheer joy."

"Are you quite sure?" asked the inspector.

"Remember that the face will look very different now from what it did during life."

"I'll go and have another look," said Mr. Levinsky, scrambling to his feet quite briskly. "I don't mind a bit so long as it isn't my brother. You come too, Rosenbaum."

The three went into the building again and stood by the table in silence.

"There certainly is a resemblance," admitted Mr. Isaac at last, "even allowing for the changes that have taken place; but it is not his face. The nose is broader and fuller than my brother's. Besides, he wore a moustache and this man is clean-shaven."

"The hair is darker too," put in Rosenbaum. "But they are very much alike in many ways."

"Look here," said Ridley, replacing the sheet, "there seems to be a bit of doubt about it after all. It is most unfortunate, because it is so essential that the body should be recognized. Can you think of any distinguishing marks which might help us? Scars, birth-marks, tattoo-marks or anything of that sort. Did he have any accidents or operations?"

"Now you mention it, he did," said Mr. Levinsky after a moment's thought. "He was always rather particular about his health, because he thought there might be consumption

in the family. As a matter of fact there is not, but he got the idea into his head because he had a tuberculous gland in his neck when he was a child. It was removed, and we were assured that it was not likely to give any further trouble. It never did, but of course the operation left a scar on his neck just below the ear—the right ear."

"I am very sorry to have to ask you to go through this again," said Ridley in a less official tone than any of his subordinates would have thought possible, "but you must have another look to make sure that the scar is not there in order to confirm your opinion. You will have to do it for the inquest, anyway, and I need hardly say that it will help us enormously in trying to find out what has happened to your brother if you can swear to this body, whether it is his or not."

He turned back the sheet again as he concluded, and Mr. Isaac bent down and examined the right side of the neck. He stood up suddenly.

"The scar!" he cried hoarsely, with outstretched hands. "The scar! It is there! I believe it is my brother after all. Israel! Israel! What have they done to you? Let me go. Let me go. I can't stand it any longer."

The inspector made no attempt to stop him as he walked unsteadily to the door.

"First it is and then it isn't," he said caustically. "You pays your money and you takes your choice. He's not much good as a witness. You have a look, Rosenbaum. You've seen the scar, I suppose?"

"Every day for thirty years, sir. I ought to know it well enough."

The clerk in his turn bent over the still form under the sheet.

"Sir," he said solemnly as he stood up again, "I believe it is my employer. There is a scar there just like his—the same size and the same place. But yet I can't swear to him. The face is so different. I don't know what to say, and that's a fact."

"Do you know whether he had any other distinguishing marks?"

"There were none as far as I know."

"This is beyond me," said Ridley. "Come on, that's all just now."

He closed the mortuary, dismissed his thoroughly distraught witness and walked back to the police-station deep in thought. His own opinion was not of much value, as he had hardly known the money-lender by sight; his two most promising witnesses had failed him utterly, and he once more felt depressed and discouraged. He kicked open his office door, flung himself

down in a chair and related the story of his failure to Drury, who was contentedly writing his report in front of the fire.

"What on earth can we do now?" he asked despondently. "We can't turn up in court with an extraordinary yarn about dead men returned to life and wrong bodies in coffins unless we can prove every scrap of it and prove it up to the hilt. If his own brother and his own clerk are not dead certain about him no jury would believe our tale for a minute. They would put the scar down to coincidence, and our case would get no further than the coroner's court. I'm beginning to think that the whole thing is a mare's nest myself. It will drive me dotty if it goes on."

"I don't think it needs a drive," replied Drury; "a short putt would do it nicely."

Ridley was too far in the depths to take any notice. "The Home Office will be down on us like a ton of bricks for exhuming the body unnecessarily," he groaned, as his imagination visualized the stormy future. "Even if there were any other distinguishing marks that anybody could swear to, what's the use? If the face isn't his a jury would allow the coincidence theory to account for any number of resemblances. And they'd be right too. But, if it isn't Levinsky, who the devil is it?"

"It must be Levinsky," replied Drury, quite unmoved by this outburst. "And I don't agree with you about the coincidences. Are you a mathematician?"

"Not so as you'd notice it."

"Neither am I. I don't know much about the pure mathematics of the theory of probabilities, but I know a little about the application of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know the professors of applied mathematics who disguise themselves as bookies? They will give you odds of twenty to one on an outsider, won't they?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"That means that in return for the pleasure of holding your modest five bob for ten minutes or so they will give you five pounds out of the goodness of their hearts and the fullness of their pockets in the unlikely event of your horse winning. In actual fact it loses and your five bob helps them to pay their super-tax; but that doesn't affect our argument. On the next race they will give you ten to one on another horse that doesn't stand much chance. But suppose you back these two horses for a double; that is, you only win if both your selections come in first. Do they add the odds together and give you thirty to one? No; such is their benevolence that they multiply them, and your five bob will win you fifty pounds instead of seven pounds ten. In our case the same applies. Each additional point doesn't just add to the certainty of identification. It multiplies it. One mark may be coincidence, and probably is; two may be coincidences but probably aren't, and three makes a virtual certainty. If we can find even three or four small points we can prove identity easily enough and definitely enough to satisfy anybody, in spite of the altered features. Are there many dentists in Southbourne?"

"Dentists?" repeated Ridley, surprised at the suddenness of the question. "Only three or four. Why?"

"Find out who Levinsky's dentist was and get him to look at the teeth. That should help. I'll see to it if you like. You are nearly due to meet the Home Office chappie."

Telephone messages to the money-lender's office and house both drew blank, as no one knew which dentist Mr. Levinsky had been in the habit of consulting. Mr. Isaac obligingly offered to look through his brother's private receipts, but Drury, remembering the missing man's attitude to his doctor's bills, thought that it would be quicker to get the information direct.

The first dentist knew nothing of him pro-

fessionally, but the second proved to be the right one. Drury was unwilling to telephone details, so he asked for an appointment and was told to come round at once. He did so, and was shown into the waiting-room. Free from the apprehension usually felt in such a situation he read one of the humorous weeklies provided with a proper appreciation of its jokes until the consulting-room door opened and a patient was ushered out by a nurse.

"Mr. Priestly can see you now, sir," she said. "Will you come in?"

As he entered, the dentist put down the spanner with which he was trying to open a refractory gas cylinder and shook hands.

"Good morning," he said affably. "I didn't quite understand from your message what you wanted to see me about. Nothing personal, I hope? Has my son been driving to the danger of the public again?"

"If he has, the local police will no doubt deal with him, Mr. Priestly," smiled Drury. "No, it is about the missing man that I wanted to see you. I suppose you can give me a pretty accurate description of Mr. Levinsky's teeth?"

"Yes, I can. Not from memory, of course, but I always keep records of work done, and keep them for reference. They are useful in case

of dispute." Mr. Priestly went to the door. "Get Mr. Levinsky's record card, nurse, please. But I don't see how that will help you if the owner of the teeth has vanished into thin air."

"It might not help us if he really had vanished, but if he hasn't your evidence will be useful."

"But why? I'm afraid I must be very dense, but surely, if he has turned up again, the whole business is finished."

"On the contrary it has only just begun," corrected Drury. "I'll explain later," he added, as the nurse came in with an envelope.

Mr. Priestly opened it and took out a card bearing a printed diagram of numbered teeth marked with various ink spots, letters and signs.

"These are the sort of records I keep for all my patients," he said, laying the card on the table. "All work done is entered on them by conventional signs—a stroke through a tooth means that it has been extracted and so on. Mr. Levinsky had pretty well preserved teeth for a man of his age. Only two of them were missing, both molars, and he did not wear a plate. The left upper canine was crowned, with a gold back to it; both lower incisors on the left side were stopped with porcelain and the second right upper molar with copper amalgam. This premolar had a small gold filling. And, you see,

these charts show the exact position of the stoppings in each tooth as well."

"That's good," replied Drury. "Now I want you to come along to the mortuary with me and see if you can identify your work. I am sorry to trouble you, but it is a serious matter."

"The mortuary!" gasped Mr. Priestly foolishly. "Why, is he dead?"

"Very," said Drury concisely, forbearing to make the obvious remark.

He explained shortly the circumstances which made the visit necessary, and Mr. Priestly readily consented to come. He pocketed the record card, took a mouth mirror and an electric torch from a drawer, collected his hat and coat and declared himself ready.

"If I may make a suggestion, sir," said the inspector, "it would be advisable to take a pair of rubber gloves along with you. There are none at the mortuary."

The gloves were procured and a fresh start made. The nurse was left to detain one or two expected patients, and Mr. Priestly dodged one who was already in the waiting-room by leaving the surgery by another door. On arrival at the mortuary the dentist's examination was short but thorough. Drury held the record card in a convenient position while Mr. Priestly checked

off each tooth against it. As he came to the thirtieth one he straightened himself up and looked across at the inspector.

"Every tooth in his head corresponds exactly to that record," he declared. "It is his mouth all right, but it is not his face as I remember it. I can swear to the one but not to the other. Make what you can of that. It's beyond me."

"Thanks very much. That is just what I expected—and hoped—to hear. How many distinctive points are there that you can recognize?"

"A dozen at least."

"Do you mind running over it again and making a note of them while you are here? There is nothing like having things down in writing. We shall have to disregard the face altogether. Nobody recognizes it, but perhaps he has been buried long enough to account for that."

"He has," said Mr. Priestly with emphasis, stripping off his gloves and dropping them into the sink. "I'll present these to the corporation, inspector. They are no further use to me now."

Mr. Priestly went back to his work and Drury remained at the mortuary. Ten minutes later Sir James Martin arrived, escorted by Ridley and the police surgeon and followed by an assistant

with two large suit-cases. Drury went in after them and locked the door.

Three hours later Sir James came out again, white-aproned and rubber-gloved, and the two inspectors waited eagerly for his words of wisdom.

"You might put a cigarette in my mouth and light it for me," was his first remark. "I can't touch it with these gloves on." He drew in the much needed smoke in great gulps and beamed genially at the little group of men. "It is a most extraordinary case, gentlemen," he continued. "Didn't you recognize him, Bateson?" This to the police surgeon.

"No. I only knew him slightly, and of course he looked very different then from what he does —now," and he jerked his head towards the mortuary with a grimace.

"Naturally. They always do," replied the experienced Sir James, blowing a beautiful smoke ring. "The average doctor doesn't see much of this sort of work and doesn't realize how great the difference is. Of course he sees hundreds of dead bodies, but they are all either fresh ones, such as the post-mortems he does for inquests, or else they are preserved like the ones he dissects in the anatomy rooms."

"It is the first one I've ever seen," admitted

the police surgeon, "so I really have no knowledge of how the features are altered. What makes him look so different to me is his enormous nose. Old Levinsky's was fairly conspicuous——"

"You'd expect that from his name."

"But it wasn't so broad as this one. I didn't even know till I got here that there was any doubt about the identity. I heard that a body called Laidlaw was to be exhumed and naturally concluded that the police were on with a new case."

"May I ask what you have found, sir?" put in Drury, who was tired of listening to profitless speculations.

"You may," replied the Home Office expert, gracefully spitting out the cigarette end, which threatened to burn his scrubby moustache. "And the answer is 'Nothing'! There are no marks of violence anywhere, as you could see for yourself. There is no sign of any disease, and all the organs are perfectly healthy. No naked eye signs of poison. Mind you, only a few poisons, generally corrosive ones, leave traces which you can see with the eye, and so I think that must be the explanation. I have kept various specimens for analysis, and we shall probably find some alkaloid present. That is all I can tell you at present. What time is the inquest?"

"Five o'clock, sir. It won't take long, be-

cause there will have to be an adjournment for the analysis. What train do you want to catch, Sir James ? "

" The 6.30 dining-car back to London if possible."

" In that case I will try and get the coroner to take your evidence early."

" Thanks. I will go and see if my assistant has finished packing the instruments yet," said Sir James, cautiously stripping off his thick rubber gauntlets.

The inquest started at five o'clock precisely, and at twenty past was adjourned for a week at the request of the police, so Sir James Martin caught his train comfortably. The coroner, who had had a heavy day conducting five inquests in four different towns, was visibly relieved at the postponement, and Drury, feeling that at last some definite progress had been made, took an evening off and went to the Empire. Certain in his own mind that the mystery was practically solved, and knowing that nothing more of importance could be done until the pathologist's report was ready, he dismissed the case from his mind and gave himself over whole-heartedly to the contemplation of the Cornaby Trio in their Amazing Acrobatic Antics.

CHAPTER X

THE INQUEST

CHARLES DOMVILLE Esq., of the Inner Temple, Barrister-at-law, was His Majesty's coroner for the County Borough of Southbourne. He was a man of very average ability who had failed to make a living in the exercise of his profession, and who had drifted precariously through various forms of employment. In turn journalist, war-time press censor, election agent and unsuccessful candidate for Parliament, he had eventually come to rest in the safe harbour of the coronership (which is a life appointment) by virtue of party influence. For some reason or other, possibly because of his natural fussiness, or perhaps because in his inmost heart he recognized his own mediocrity, he had a too exalted idea of the dignity of his office. Like a certain admiral during the war he ranked himself, in Navy parlance, " with but after " the Almighty.

It is quite true that the King's coroner is an exceedingly useful person. His function is to

preserve inviolate the deep-rooted tradition of the sanctity of human life, which is perhaps stronger in this country than anywhere in the world, and he is and has been for hundreds of years one of the most potent safe-guards against death by violence. To this end he is given very considerable powers. He can summon a jury and compel witnesses to attend and give evidence before him on oath, he can issue a warrant for the arrest of a suspected person or commit him for trial. It should be added that he nearly always exercises his powers with courtesy and consideration. Mr. Domville was therefore correct in regarding the coronership as an appointment of some dignity, but it is to be feared that he did so from personal motives, under the impression that the prestige of the office increased and magnified his own importance. In accordance with these opinions he cultivated the widest possible publicity. Not for him were the hole-and-corner inquests conducted in public-house parlours; such informality he abhorred as detracting from the dignity of the occasion.

He regretted the continuance of the war-time economy which authorized him to dispense with the jury in certain cases, and much preferred the full-dress performances which made his court into a colourable imitation of a court of Assize. The

present occasion was an inquest after his own heart. A jury was, of course, essential; Scotland Yard and the Home Office had already had a hand in it and public interest was rapidly growing. The case had already reached the three-column headline stage of importance, and the number of reporters present overflowed the limited accommodation provided for them.

Mr. Shaw, the representative of the "Gazette," and Mr. Blake, reporter-editor-proprietor of the "Recorder," who had been for many years the solitary inhabitants of the Press Gallery (two chairs) in the Southbourne police court, were deprived of their normal isolation and submerged in the crowd of efficient young men armed with pencils and notebooks who filled the first two rows of seats in the public portion of the court. The benches behind were crowded with spectators half an hour before the inquiry was due to begin.

Charles Domville Esq., a thin little man with sandy eyebrows and a bald head indifferently camouflaged by a few carefully trained wisps of hair allowed to grow long for the purpose, was closeted with Inspector Drury in the Magistrates' room and was not in the best of tempers. He chewed the end of his pen and frowned up at the impassive figure standing before him. Always

mindful of his dignity, he remained seated during the interview, but did not ask his visitor to sit down. It is nearly always the more ineffective personality who lays most stress upon outward forms and ceremonies, in contrast to the man who is really master of a situation. Napoleon in the midst of his marshals looked like a grey sparrow among peacocks—but only on the surface.

In this instance, while emphasizing Mr. Domville's opinion of the gulf which lay between himself and a mere police official, their relative positions were a positive disadvantage to him. A schoolmaster may wisely remain seated what time an erring boy stands in front of him for judgment, shifting from one foot to the other in agonies of embarrassment. A business man interviewing his cashier may do the same without loss of prestige, but it is beyond the power of a man, small both physically and mentally, to dominate from an arm-chair a stronger character who stands before him easily and naturally, unembarrassed by the guilty conscience of the schoolboy and unhampered by the dependent position of the cashier.

Mr. Domville attempted to stare the inspector out of countenance and failed. He looked down at the floor and renewed his attack on the pen,

the frown on his face deepening as he did so. Here were all the ingredients for a really sensational inquest, an investigation which would do honour to the venerable institution of the coroner's court and justify its existence as a safe-guard of life and liberty, and the inspector was demanding that he should limit the scope of the inquiry. The request was couched in courteous and respectful terms to which no exception could be taken, and which implied that the coroner would be conferring a favour if he chose to accede to it, but it was made by a man who had obviously not contemplated the possibility of a refusal, and Mr. Domville instinctively recognized this and resented it. The ill-used fountain pen at length rebelled and leaked ink as a protest. Mr. Domville made a grimace and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief.

"You say you do not want Derrington or Laidlaw mentioned more than necessary. Why not?" he queried pettishly.

"Because our case is by no means complete yet, sir. His name can't be kept out of it altogether, but we want to keep quiet about his arrest at any rate."

"His name? Which one? Is he one man or two?"

"Only one as far as we know, sir. Laidlaw is the real name, and Derrington is an *alias*. We are holding him at present for the burglary at Levinsky's, which we think we can prove. He left his finger-prints on the knob of the safe."

"Dear me. Did he really? I thought criminals always wore gloves."

"So they do—the professionals, that is. But it was this man's first attempt, and he didn't know much about the technique. Besides, he had a bigger job to occupy his mind and this burglary was only a sideline. We have also charged him and his wife with the fraud on the insurance company, and we know we can prove that, even if the other falls through. But we think he had something to do with Levinsky's death and we are not certain how many others were in with him. His wife certainly is, because she helped him with the faked funeral and tried to draw the insurance money, but we don't know whether he had any other accomplices. If he had we don't want them to know too much. The trouble is that we have no proof of all this yet, and we cannot bring forward any evidence to justify you issuing a coroner's warrant for murder."

"When I need information about coroner's warrants I will ask for it, inspector," replied Mr.

Domville in an acid tone. "I propose to inquire into the death of this man in the usual way, and if the police confine themselves strictly to facts connected with the death in their evidence, as they are bound by the oath to do, Derrington's arrest need not be mentioned at all. Burglary and false pretences do not concern me or my court in any way."

"That is all we want, sir. I was not suggesting for a moment that the proceedings of the court should be tampered with. Only sometimes jurymen are apt to ask irrelevant questions——"

"I have had ten years' experience of jurymen," interrupted Mr. Domville, "and I shall certainly not permit irrelevancy. I quite agree that you have a *prima facie* case against Derrington."

The clock in the tower overhead chimed the half-hour and the coroner, who was a punctual man, stopped abruptly and opened the door leading to the justices' bench.

"Pompous ass!" thought Drury disrespectfully as he left the Magistrates' room by a humbler door and made his way to the court by the side corridor which led past the witnesses' waiting-room.

The entrance of Mr. Domville was announced by the coroner's officer in stentorian tones, and the occupants of the court stood up.

Mr. Domville, despite his weak points, was in many ways good at his work. His journalistic and political training had made him a fluent and lucid speaker, and he had the gift of disentangling evidence and presenting it to the jury in a clear and precise manner. Much may be forgiven to a coroner who can do this. He always began his inquests by a little speech to the jury, when there was one, in which he outlined the scope and method of their procedure.

"Gentlemen," he began, when he had taken his seat and the court had followed his example, "you are empanelled to inquire into the death of a man buried under the name of Laidlaw. As you know, the body which you have had the opportunity of viewing was removed from Dr. Laidlaw's grave as a result of investigations made by the local police, assisted by an officer from Scotland Yard. Why these inquiries were made will transpire from the police evidence. Why the man died will be revealed by the Home Office pathologist who made the post-mortem examination and who promised that his tests would be finished by to-day. Who the man was—and I may say now that he is thought not to be the man under whose name he was buried—and whose was the responsibility for his death, if it was not from natural causes, is for you to decide

after hearing the evidence. Call the first witness, please."

Mr. Rosenbaum was ushered into the box and sworn, Jewish fashion, upon the Old Testament. He related how the non-appearance of his employer at the office had caused him to set the machinery of the law in motion.

"Any questions?" asked the coroner, turning to the jury.

"Yes, sir," replied the foreman. "I should like to ask the witness why he suspected anything serious so soon."

Mr. Rosenbaum gave details of his employer's methodical habits until the foreman expressed himself satisfied, and was then dismissed for the time being. Ridley, who was about to take his place, warned him in a whisper not to leave the court as he would be wanted again. The clerk sat down and Ridley passed on to the witness-box. He took the oath with the effortless fluency of an expert, after which he gave a condensed account of his preliminary investigations. He told how his suspicions were directed to the house in Castle Road, how they were allayed by Mrs. Laidlaw's letter and how he called in further advice after failing to trace the money-lender.

The court listened breathlessly, a low murmur of interest breaking out when he stepped down

from the box to give place to Drury. The pressmen gently massaged their aching wrists and thought over their headlines.

"Your full name, please?" asked the coroner.

"Dennis Drury, sir."

"You are, I believe, a detective inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department?"

"Yes, sir."

The jury stared at the speaker with open mouths. It was probably the first time that any of them had ever seen a "real" detective, for the local detective officers were not counted as such. Prophets are not the only ones who have no honour in their own country.

"Will you please tell the jury what happened when you took over the case from the last witness?"

"I first made out a list of events from Inspector Ridley's notes, sir, and arranged them in the order of their occurrence. A discrepancy in this list turned my attention to Holm Lea, the house which had previously been under suspicion. The premises were searched and evidence was found which confirmed Inspector Ridley's view that the missing man had been there on the night of his disappearance."

Drury took from his pocket a cardboard box, opened it and removed a layer of cotton-wool. He

then gave it to the coroner's officer with instructions to hand it up to the bench for inspection.

"Mr. Dawson, the optician, is in court and is prepared to swear that these broken lenses, which were found at Holm Lea, are ground to the same formula—a rather unusual one—as a pair which he supplied recently to Mr. Levinsky."

Mr. Domville examined the fragments with interest and then passed them down to the jury. He looked at Drury with less antagonism than before. This taciturn official was, after all, not quite so secretive as he had imagined. Meanwhile the strategist in the witness-box waited in satisfied silence with an almost imperceptible glint of amusement in his half-shut eyes. The production of the lenses at the psychological moment had effectively occupied the attention of the court and side-tracked the time-table incident, about which he did not want to be questioned at this stage. To explain it fully would broadcast the fact that it had led him to suspect the occupants rather than the house. In order to distract attention still further from this point, as soon as the interest aroused by the lenses showed signs of subsiding, he handed up the broken glass tube and the slab of wax which had also been found during the search.

"These were found at the same time, sir. We

took possession of them merely because they were unusual objects, and I can give no opinion as to whether they are relevant to the case or not. They are thought to be portions of a medical syringe and part of a block of paraffin wax."

The exhibits were passed round amid much bewildered wrinkling of brows on the part of those who were near enough to see them, and exasperated neck-stretching on the part of those who were not. The coroner motioned Drury to continue.

"Acting on this and on information received," he went on vaguely, "I applied for an order to open the grave of the occupant of the house, who had been buried shortly before. The body recovered was the one which now lies in the mortuary. That is all, sir."

"Before proceeding further," said the coroner, "I should like the jury to understand the reason for recapitulating all these details. Recently there have been certain criticisms in the daily press suggesting that the police are in the habit of abusing their power and overstepping the bounds of legality. It might be thought in some quarters that the serious step of exhuming a body which had been buried under a death certificate in the normal way was an instance

of this. We must therefore, in all fairness to them, allow them to state publicly their motives for thus violating the sanctity of an apparently innocent grave."

"'A beast, but a just beast,'" quoted Drury to himself.

"Are there any questions you would like to ask the witness?" resumed Mr. Domville, running his eye along the row of jurymen.

"Yes, sir," replied the foreman. "This gentleman has told us that he suspected the missing man to be in the grave of Dr. Laidlaw. May I ask, then, where is Dr. Laidlaw?"

This very natural question was touching upon delicate ground, but Mr. Domville was equal to the occasion. He had by now quite recovered his temper and smiled almost affectionately at the foreman, who had provided him with an opportunity for another speech. Mr. Domville liked the sound of his own voice.

"I am afraid that is rather outside the bounds of this inquiry," he replied blandly. "It is true that an inquest is not fettered by rules of procedure to the same extent as other courts, and a great deal of latitude is allowable in order to solve the problems submitted to it. But I must point out again that the problem before us is to identify and make inquiry touching the death

of the body you have viewed. Every reasonable question tending to this result is perfectly in order, but your question does not fulfil this condition. I must remind you that it is your duty to be guided by the evidence and the evidence alone, and not by suspicions or conjectures. Up to the present there is no evidence to show whether the body is that of Dr. Laidlaw or not. If it proves in fact to be his body the question is superfluous. If it does not, then the whereabouts of Dr. Laidlaw does not concern you, as a jury."

The foreman sat down again, somewhat confused and rather sulky. As a matter of form Drury waited a few moments to give an opportunity for further questions, but none were forthcoming, so he left the box and Rosenbaum was recalled.

"You have viewed the body, I think, Mr. Rosenbaum?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you recognize it?"

"I think so, sir."

"Think so! Remember you are on oath, sir. Did you recognize it or did you not?"

"I could not swear to it, sir."

"Oh, next witness," said the coroner irritably. "I cannot waste the time of the court dealing

with people who do not know their own minds. Isn't there any relative here, inspector?"

Ridley was already conducting Mr. Isaac to the witness-vox, *vice* the unfortunate Rosenbaum, who almost fell down the steps in his anxiety to reach a less conspicuous position. The little Jew took the oath tearfully and clung to the brass rail before him for support.

"What relation are you to Mr. Israel Levinsky?" asked Mr. Domville.

"His brother."

"Good. Your evidence should, at least, be definite, whether it is affirmative or not." The two inspectors split a smile between them. "Did you recognize the body?" continued the potentate on the bench.

"I don't know," faltered the unhappy witness.

"What! Do you seriously mean that?"

"I do. When I first saw it I was certain it was the face of a stranger, but the inspector made me look for a scar on the neck, and I recognized it at once."

"Was the scar your only means of identificatio?"

"It was."

"Thank you, Mr. Levinsky, that will do. I have no wish to prolong what must be a painful ordeal for you, and if you are unable to give us

any more definite information there is no point in my asking you any more questions."

Mr. Levinsky bowed gratefully and left the court.

"Recall Rosenbaum," said the coroner. The clerk stepped into the box for the third time. "Now, Mr. Rosenbaum, you are not the only one who is doubtful, it appears. Did you also see the scar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it familiar to you?"

"Yes. It was the same shape and in the same position as the one which I have seen for years on my employer."

"But in spite of this the face was unrecognizable?"

"It was, sir. But there was a slight resemblance."

"Oh, indeed. This uncertainty is very unfortunate. Have you any further evidence of identity, inspector?"

"Yes, sir. And it is much more satisfactory. If you will call Mr. Priestly——"

The dentist was duly called and swore positively that the dead man's teeth were identical with Mr. Levinsky's in fifteen separate and distinct points of resemblance. The foreman of the jury cheered up again and nodded his head

sagely with an air of having known it all the time. A whispering hum of excitement ran through the court as the dentist concluded.

"Silence, please," said the coroner sternly. "Any more noise and the court will be cleared. Gentlemen," he went on, addressing the jury, "we may now take it that the identity of the deceased is proved. The teeth and the scar between them furnish us with no less than sixteen features of similarity—far too great a number to be due to mere chance. The doubt felt by the witnesses who tried to recognize facial details is clearly attributable to the natural changes of death and decay. I feel confident you will agree that the missing man is found and that the body you have viewed is that of the late Mr. Israel Levinsky."

Dr. Osborne was the next witness, and his long, thin form drooped gracefully over the brass rail as he waited for Mr. Domville to write down his name and qualifications.

"Did you attend Dr. Laidlaw in his illness?" inquired the coroner at last.

"I did."

"Without going into Dr. Laidlaw's affairs, which do not concern us," continued the coroner, with a pointed glance in the direction of the foreman, "can you, from your knowledge of the

case, suggest any reason for the extraordinary substitution of bodies which apparently took place at his house ? "

" No, sir. When I last saw Dr. Laidlaw the day before he died he was very seriously ill, and I had no hesitation in giving a death certificate. The circumstances were not in any way out of the ordinary."

" Any questions ? " asked Mr. Domville in a perfunctory manner.

A grey-haired, hatchet-faced man stood up at the table in front of the bench.

" I represent the Diamond Insurance Company, sir, in which company Dr. Laidlaw held a policy for four thousand pounds. You saw nothing suspicious during the whole time of your attendance, doctor ? "

" Nothing at all. It was undoubtedly a straightforward case of meningitis."

" Did you see the body after death ? "

" No."

" Indeed." The grey-haired man looked at the jury over his spectacles. " Do you often give certificates without seeing the body ? "

" Oh, yes. About eighty or ninety per cent of them. Everybody does. The wording of the certificate permits it."

" I see. You understand, doctor, that this

man died and his widow applied for his insurance money. By some conjuring trick or other the wrong body is found in his grave. Therefore Dr. Laidlaw's body—insured with us—is missing——"

" And as such does not concern us at present, Mr. Lawson," interrupted the coroner. " When it is found an inquest will be held and you may ask what you like about it, but not now, I am afraid."

The solicitor apologized and sat down, somewhat crest-fallen. Drury again smiled across at Ridley. Mr. Domville, in spite of his waspish reception of the police requirements, was doing his very best to carry them out. Sir James Martin, who was sitting next to Mr. Lawson, was then called into the box and sworn. He arranged his notes on the ledge before him ; the reporters turned over fresh leaves of their notebooks ; the coroner hastily finished his writing, and everybody leaned forward expectantly. After a few preliminary formal questions as to name and qualifications, he asked :

" You have made an examination of the body of the deceased, Sir James ? "

" I have, sir."

" With what result ? "

" Completely negative."

"Ah, yes, of course. So I gather from your report here, which you handed in before the adjournment. At the post-mortem you found no marks of violence and no signs of any disease. All the organs were perfectly healthy. In view of this I adjourned the inquest for you to make an analysis. It was more particularly with reference to this that I asked the question. Will you kindly tell the jury what results you obtained?"

"As the naked eye appearances gave me no clue whatever to the probable nature of the poison, if any, a very exhaustive examination, both microscopical and chemical, was necessary. Dragendorff's process for the separation of alkaloids and other vegetable poisons yielded no results. Other tests confirmed this. Poisonous metals such as arsenic and lead were entirely absent. Spectroscopic examination of the blood showed no traces of carbon monoxide or coal-gas poisoning——"

"What is the significance of carbon monoxide, Sir James?" interposed the coroner, seeing that some of the jurymen looked puzzled.

"It is a deadly gas formed during imperfect combustion, sir. It is not often met with as a cause of death, but it is much more common now than it used to be. People who run the engines

of their cars in a closed garage run a grave risk of being overcome by it."

"Thank you. Go on, please."

"Lastly," continued the pathologist, "I took cultures to test for the presence of food-poisoning bacteria, but none were present. In short no trace of poison of any kind was found."

Sir James's voice, as he recounted the story of his many failures, preserved the even, dispassionate tones of the scientist whose goal is truth and who is not ashamed to confess to a difficulty in finding it. There was absolute silence in the crowded court as he ceased speaking.

"What then, in your opinion, was the cause of death?" inquired the coroner, dipping his pen in the ink-pot in readiness to write down the solution of the mystery.

"Frankly, sir, I have no idea."

CHAPTER XI

THE OPINION OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

THE day after the open verdict was returned the following leader appeared in the " Southbourne Gazette " :

In the Middle Ages there was a universal tendency to interpret phenomena in a supernatural way, so much so that almost anything which could not be explained by the defective science of the time was deemed to be a miracle. Scientists themselves were in grave danger of being burnt as magicians, especially if their work led them to deviate in the smallest degree from the rigid orthodoxy of the all-powerful Church. When such a state of things existed it is not surprising that deaths from obscure disease were invariably attributed to poison. But as the bounds of knowledge grew wider mysteries of all kinds became fewer, and it is often assumed that poisoning, as a fine art, is extinct, mainly because the modern poisoner rarely escapes detection, whereas the infamous Borgias poisoned whom they would with impunity.

The reasons for their success were as simple as the poison they used, and it is quite unnecessary

to credit the Borgias or their imitators with any profound knowledge. The odds, which are now heavily against the criminal, were weighted in their favour. Owing to the prevailing cheapness of human life investigations into the cause of death were uncommon and, in the rare cases when they were made, of such a cursory nature as to be quite valueless. The primitive state of toxicology or the science of poisons, and the absence of exact analytical methods rendered detection almost impossible. Even if this had not been so the administration of the law was so defective and so subject to class limitations that justice, in the impartial modern sense of the word, did not exist.

A poisoner of high birth was not only immune from penalties, provided he avoided the delicate and ferociously punished subject of treason, but he could even gain experience at his horrible hobby by actual practice upon human beings. This was done more than once by the Lords of the High Justice, the Middle and the Low in the days when equality was unknown and the rights of man were in all things subject to the will of the seigneur. The Cantarella, jealously guarded and deadly secret of the Borgias, was in all probability merely white arsenic, now degraded to the rank of a weed-killer and sheep-dip. The famous Aqua Toffana, which was responsible for the deaths of over six hundred persons, including two popes, and which was sold unblushingly from the sanctuary of a convent, was also an arsenical preparation.

All this has changed. To use arsenic, the famous mystery poison of the past, is virtually to meet the hangman half-way. Its symptoms are so well known that suspicion is often aroused even before the death of the victim, its detection in the body after death is so easy and the tracing of the purchaser so simple that conviction and expiation of the crime follow almost as a mathematical certainty. It has the further disadvantage, from the poisoner's point of view, that it preserves the victim so efficiently that it may be recovered from the body and used in evidence against him many years after death. It is, in fact, one of the sheet-anchors of the taxidermist as a preservative, and this alone should warn the prospective murderer of its unsuitability. One after another nearly all known poisons have followed the same course and become dangerous to their users, and the process has been going on with increasing rapidity during modern times.

Dr. Christison, a famous toxicologist of the nineteenth century, once stated while giving evidence that there was only one poison which could not be satisfactorily identified after death, namely—— Here the judge hastily stopped him and remarked that it was better not to enlighten the public on that point. Dr. Christison afterwards explained to his class of medical students that this particular alkaloid was aconitine, and years later one of them—Lamson by name—made practical use of this fragment of knowledge. Unfortunately for him science had progressed sufficiently by that time (1881) to identify

aconitine in the body of his victim, and Lamson paid the supreme penalty for his mistaken reliance on out-of-date knowledge.

It is quite usual in modern forensic medicine for the scientific witness to be able not only to swear to the cause of death with certainty, but also to estimate to a fraction of a milligramme the amount of poison present, and this is one of the reasons why the way of the murderer is hard. The recent inquest in the Town Hall has aroused much comment because it is a complete departure from the usual precise and definite verdict expected of the twentieth-century "Crowner's quest." Open verdicts are not uncommon it is true, but an open verdict combined with the suspicious circumstances of the case in question is most disquieting. The body of a fellow townsman, whose hitherto inexplicable disappearance has been occupying the attention of the police for some weeks, has been found in a grave purporting to belong to another man. Dramatic as this discovery was, the mystery was deepened and the drama was heightened by the complete inability of the Home Office pathologist to find any cause for death.

We can only remember, during recent years, one other instance where no cause for death was found on examination, but, as there were no suspicious circumstances of any kind, the case was merely a medical curiosity of no practical importance. In our own case, however, the police have very natural suspicions of foul play and we understand that they are continuing

their investigations. We can only hope that they will be successful, for the sake of humanity in general, in unravelling the mystery in our midst.

Many interesting points arise from a consideration of the report of the inquest, which is given in full in our news columns. The great difficulty of any murderer is to dispose of his victim. Fortunately for society the human body, though easy to kill, is an exceedingly awkward object to destroy or conceal. It is heavy and bulky, cannot easily be preserved, and contains such a large percentage of water that it is quite impossible to burn it in any ordinary fire. If hidden by submersion it generally comes to the surface sooner or later; even if it does not it can be recovered by dragging operations and can be identified after the lapse of years.

As a solution to this difficult problem it is a very sound plan to hide a body in a grave in a municipal cemetery under cover of a death certificate and a funeral procession, which appears to have been done in this case; it almost equals in ingenuity the murderer of fiction who bought an Egyptian mummy complete with case, burnt the mummy—an easy thing to do, for a body embalmed and stored in a hot, dry climate for two thousand years is very much more inflammable than a fresh one—embalmed his victim, packed him in the empty mummy case and presented it to the British Museum!

Too much credit cannot be given to the police for their solution of the enigma thus far. Their

task was more difficult than that of looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack; they had to look for a piece of hay in the haystack—for so we may describe a body in a cemetery—and they found it. Presumably their next step is to trace the invalid by whose aid the death certificate was obtained from the doctor. Was he the murderer? That seems impossible from the medical evidence: the man was so ill that the certificate was given without the slightest hesitation. Was he a mere tool used by the murderer? If so, what did the latter do with him? It is not feasible to fly from justice in these days of rapid transport and telephones encumbered with a moribund companion. Was he murdered after he had served his purpose as a decoy for procuring the certificate? In that case the criminal would defeat his own ends and again have a surplus body on his hands.

Whatever the solution of the mystery, the moral to be drawn is that the present system of death certification is faulty. A medical man can, and generally does, give a certificate without being able to certify to the *fact* of death. Twice during the last few years has the wording of the official form been altered, but merely in detail, leaving the essential weakness untouched.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRISONER MAKES A STATEMENT

HAVING been warned by Inspector Drury that it may be used in evidence at my trial, I desire to make the following statement after my arrest on a charge of burglary and of obtaining money by false pretences.

I qualified as a medical practitioner twelve years ago, and immediately after passing my final examination secured an appointment as house surgeon under my old Chief, who was good enough to advise me to stay on at the hospital and work for the higher surgical degrees with the idea of ultimately being appointed to the staff. Surgery made a strong appeal to me, as to most other young doctors, and the idea of becoming a surgical specialist was very attractive. But there were difficulties in the way. My parents were never rich, and only by great self-denial were they able to pay for my medical course. At the beginning of my hospital work therefore it had been definitely settled that as soon as I was qualified I was to keep myself and no longer look to them for assistance. As a house surgeon

this was easy. Board and lodging are provided, in addition to a minute salary, dignified by the title of an honorarium. But after that the way of the embryo specialist is hard. On earning promotion to the rank of Surgical Registrar a small salary is given, but board and lodging are no longer provided, and on further promotion to Assistant Surgeon even the salary ceases. As a rule many years of hospital work elapse before a living wage is earned in consultant practice, which means that private means are necessary to bridge the gap.

Even so, with all these anomalies, by which each step in rank carries with it less pay (a condition which prevails in all teaching hospitals), I might have managed to keep myself until private work materialized. Others, equally penniless, have done it successfully by dint of rigid economy and with the aid of money earned by coaching students, assisting senior surgeons in their private work and similar odd jobs. But a bachelor can do what a married man cannot, and during the period of my house surgeoncy I had married one of the nurses. This was done in secrecy and youthful haste and meant the abandonment of my chosen career. It became necessary for me to take up some branch of medicine which would enable me to earn a living wage at once, unless my wife and I were to continue to live in the same institution as strangers kept apart by the rigid discipline of the place—an intolerable position.

I searched the advertisement columns of the

medical papers and finally, after several fruitless interviews with medical agents, decided to settle in Barhaven. This was eleven years ago. At that time the practice was a good one, bringing in about two thousand pounds a year, and I agreed to pay three thousand for it (a year and a half's income being the customary purchase price of a medical practice) and a rent of eighty pounds a year for the house.

Considering the size of the place Barhaven is overstocked with doctors and the competition is intense. This, of course, makes the lot of the new-comer difficult. In my own case the receipts dropped to fourteen hundred after I bought the practice, many people, when their old doctor retired, preferring to call in one of the many older-established practitioners rather than a stranger. Having no private income or available capital I had arranged to pay for the practice by instalments out of my earnings. The instalments, with interest on the unpaid portion, and the heavy expenses of the work, which was scattered over a wide area in the surrounding district, kept me constantly poor.

I found also that my wife had no idea of the value of money and was very extravagant. I am not blaming her, but the simple fact is that she cannot understand how it is possible to be hard-up with such a—to her—colossal income. I earn more every week than she earned in a year as a probationer and to her an average gross income of twenty-eight pounds a week seemed enormous. She cannot or will not realize what a large

proportion of this goes in motoring expenses, drug bills, rates and taxes, instalments of debt, insurances and other expenses.

Financial troubles in their turn caused me to take to drink, and this made the practice go downhill still further. An old-established medical man can do the most outrageous things and still retain the confidence of his patients, who have known and trusted him for years, but a new-comer has no such latitude, as I found to my cost.

In addition to this, as my income depended solely upon my own personal earnings, I had to make provision for my wife in case anything happened to me. I went to Levinsky, partly in order to insure my life (for which I took out a policy for four thousand pounds) and partly to pay off the remainder of the instalments, which wrecked my bank balance every quarter with relentless and depressing regularity. Bad finance, I know, but I was distracted with worry, loaded with unpayable bills and threatened with penalties for not paying them. I eventually borrowed five thousand pounds under the name of Edward Derrington, taking advantage of Levinsky's plan of secrecy (at a price) because a doctor's reputation is very easily injured by rumours reflecting on his solvency.

Then, so gradually and insidiously that I cannot remember exactly who thought of it first, came a great temptation. There was after all a way out of our difficulties, dishonest and illegal it is true, but easier than a lifetime of hard work under a crushing burden of debt. Probably

the idea was first mentioned in joke between us, and then it slowly took root in our minds and became a practicable proposition. If I died my wife would draw four thousand pounds. If I appeared to die she would also get her four thousand, provided that the fraud was sufficiently skilfully staged to avoid detection, with the added advantage that I should be able to share it. So together we thought out this plan (I am not incriminating my wife any further by confessing this, because it is quite obvious that she was a party to the scheme. For one thing she was to fetch the doctor and later the certificate). We were to go to a place where I was not well known, take a furnished house so as to avoid inquisitive landladies, and after an interval my wife was to fetch a doctor to me. I was to fake a serious illness so thoroughly as to defy detection by him, which of course is a thing that no layman could do with safety, and after a day or two she was to obtain a death certificate. I knew perfectly well that a doctor will always give the certificate without seeing the body if he has seen the patient shortly before death, and if the illness is of such a nature that the death is not unexpected. The wording of the official form permits this and even encourages it, because it provides that the certificate must be given without charge. Also most doctors feel reluctant to visit a house where a death has just taken place unless specially asked to do so. They subconsciously feel that they are the last persons unwarrantably to intrude on the private griefs following their own failure to keep

the patient alive. I always felt like this however unavoidable the fatality. Anyhow, I was certain that there would be no difficulty about the certificate. We were then to fake a funeral.

Well, on the night on which I was to "die," I got out of bed to make some final arrangements and happened to look out of the window. I saw a man walking past our gate suddenly stagger and fall. He lay there in a heap on the pavement quite still, so I called down to my wife and asked her to have a look at him, because any unforeseen incident of that kind, with its possible consequences of police and ambulances visiting the neighbourhood, would almost certainly mean a postponement of the final stages of our plan. I did not want to risk going out myself, as I was supposed to be dangerously ill. She came running back with the news that she thought he was dead. It suddenly struck me that, if it was true —and it was unlikely that an experienced nurse like my wife would be mistaken—it was just what we wanted. So I put on my overcoat, turned up the collar, pulled down my hat brim and went out with her, after looking carefully up and down the road to make certain that Dr. Osborne was not on his way to pay me an evening visit. It was nearly dark and there was nobody about, so we carried him into the house and shut the door. Judge of my amazement when I recognized Levinsky, the money-lender! And he was certainly dead. I knew, of course, that he lived in Southbourne, and it would have been nothing out of the ordinary for me to have met him in

the street. One does that sort of thing every day. But it was an amazing coincidence that he should die at my very door. Still, after all people have to die somewhere, and a certain number of them do die in the street. Stranger coincidences than this have happened.

However, it was a *Deus ex machina* with a vengeance, doubly so. A corpse was just what I wanted to make the fake funeral easy. But Levinsky of all people! The possibilities of the situation struck me almost at once, and I hurriedly bent down and went through his pockets. With his keys and his body in my possession I could not only carry through the funeral much more easily and with less fear of detection, and so draw the four thousand pounds insurance money in my wife's name, but I could also go to his office and destroy the evidence of my debt to him (£5000) in addition perhaps to collecting whatever ready cash he had in the safe. I thus stood to gain at least nine thousand pounds for a new start in a foreign country as well as what my wife, as my temporary executor, could realize from the sale of the practice—probably two thousand pounds. When one has already planned one robbery, even if it is a first attempt, an additional one does not cause one any qualms of conscience.

After half an hour's hard thinking I finally perfected my supplementary scheme, which fitted into the original one admirably. I realized, of course, that Levinsky would be missed and that a search would be made for him, but this

did not worry me. He would be in the safest of all hiding-places—another man's grave—and nothing would remain to connect him with me. So I thought at the time, but I was evidently mistaken. The corpse was stowed in an empty bedroom until Dr. Osborne had been, and as soon as he had gone I proceeded to practical details. First, having undressed the body and put it in my bed, I altered it so that it would not be recognized. I shaved it and darkened the hair with some dye which I had bought for my own use later on, and then, not satisfied with this, injected melted paraffin wax under the skin of the nose through a hollow needle and moulded it so that the whole face looked different. It is surprising how little is needed to do this.

I then took Levinsky's keys and a pocket torch and went along to his office. I had been there before when I borrowed the money, so I knew my way about. There was no difficulty and very little risk of being caught in the act, because I had the proper keys and walked straight in instead of having to waste time at the door. (If the keys had not fitted I should have abandoned the idea at once. I know nothing of the art of burglary.) I unlocked his private office and opened the safe, and with my torch carefully shaded found the address book after a little search. When I borrowed the money I had signed it and he had explained its use to me, so I had had a good look at it and recognized it easily. It took me about another twenty minutes to find my I.O.U. I then went home

and burnt them both and left for Birmingham by an early train while it was still dark. The next morning my wife went to the doctor for the certificate and then called in the undertakers in the usual way.

It required much thought to choose the faked illness. Disease after disease was considered and rejected for various reasons. It was necessary that the selected one should be of such a kind that the doctor could easily make a definite diagnosis and so be prepared to give a certificate without suspicion or doubt of any kind. For the same reason it had to be a serious condition in which death would cause no surprise. Lastly it was essential that the counterfeit should be a good one, because it had to deceive a skilled observer. Naturally the more outward and visible signs the better would these conditions be fulfilled. Symptoms alone, felt by the patient and not apparent to anyone else, were not good enough.

I finally selected meningitis, and did it well enough for it to be recognized as such. I put atropine drops into one eye to get the dilated and unequal pupil and gave myself a tenth of a grain of apomorphine hypodermically when I heard Dr. Osborne come into the house on his first visit. This made me violently sick five minutes later. I held my neck muscles stiff to imitate the head retraction of meningitis, and the pulse very soon became rapid and feeble from the horrible nausea which followed the dose of apomorphine. As regards the high temperature,

much can be done by holding a hot water bottle under the arm for a few minutes while the doctor is taking off his hat and coat in the hall.

I desire to make this full statement of my guilt in order to assist the police as much as possible. It seemed to me, especially when the unexpected body arrived so very opportunely, that there was no possible flaw anywhere in our plan, but, as it has miscarried, my chief concern now is not to deny the offences with which I am charged and about which the police seem to know a great deal, but to avoid being charged with a murder which I did not commit. To me, speaking as a medical man, Levinsky appeared to die a natural, if sudden, death, as far as one can judge without the evidence of a post-mortem. I certainly had no hand in it and I await the result of the inevitable analysis with perfect confidence.

(Signed) HAROLD SAMUEL LAIDLAW, M.B.
alias EDWARD DERRINGTON
Holly Grove, Barhaven.

"Well," remarked Drury to Ridley, after they had both read through the prisoner's statement carefully. "Long-winded devil, isn't he? What are we to make of it?"

"We've got him for burglary and false pretences all right. He admits them."

"Yes, but the point is, how much of the rest of his story are we to believe? It certainly hangs together, and we know some of it is true. He

buried Levinsky sure enough, and the fake illness explains our problem of the second invalid. Do you remember how we wondered what had happened to him, and how the "Southbourne Gazette" made such a point about it? It never struck me that he didn't exist. I never thought of a dud illness because Osborne was so certain about the meningitis. Of course, as Laidlaw says, no layman could have done it. We can't accept it all as gospel without investigating it, anyway. We must find out from Dr. Osborne whether all the symptoms he noticed can be explained by Laidlaw's statement. We can't check that ourselves, but we can check the rest of it, and we must do it pretty carefully too. Personally I am going to study it sentence by sentence and see if there are any discrepancies. You remember the time-table incident? If he's making any of it up we ought to be able to catch him out somewhere, because we probably know several things that he doesn't know we know."

Silence ensued for the best part of an hour as the two men studied their copies of the document. Ridley contented himself with reading it; Drury sat with a large sheet of paper in front of him and made copious notes. It was one of his favourite methods of investigation, and he always

pursued it with extreme thoroughness. He never lost a chance to practise it and had trained himself to an uncanny degree of efficiency. Even when reading fiction he found more enjoyment in detecting contradictions and authors' errors than in the story itself.

Finally Ridley pushed back his chair, lit his pipe and walked over to the fire-place. Here he warmed the seat of his trousers after the manner of the pensive Briton and scribbled notes on the back of an envelope. A few minutes later Drury reached for the red ink-pot and heavily underlined several scattered sentences in his large sheet of notes.

"Finished?" asked Ridley.

"Yes, I have, and a very interesting statement it is when you've analysed it. What do you think of it?"

"Well," responded Ridley somewhat diffidently, looking at his envelope, "I don't know much about this method of yours, but using one's common sense——"

"And that's all you've got to do," interrupted Drury. "There's nothing cryptic about it."

"It doesn't seem quite such a good explanation now. The first thing that struck me was the incredibly lucky coincidence of a corpse turning up just when he wanted one. He tries

to explain that away by saying that impossible coincidences do happen. They do, but——"

"Right. Point number one. Point number two is an extension of it."

"I don't quite see what you mean. My second point is something quite different."

"Well, granted that by a million to one chance this really happened, why should it be the one corpse in all the world that was specially valuable to him—that doubled his winnings, in fact? It's our old friend the theory of probabilities again—only this time it is the other way round. Each coincidence multiplies the improbability of the preceding one. That is my second red-ink note. What's yours? We'll call it number three."

"He says that Levinsky was walking past the house, and we are jolly nearly certain that he went there by car."

"Quite so. We can't actually prove it, but your speedometer and tar-splashing brain-waves are nearly conclusive and they are backed up by the fact that Derrington's note was found in the car itself. Now it's my turn. Point number four is even more important. His original scheme sounds very weak in one respect if we accept his story. Did you notice the way he describes at great length how he planned every detail of the illness and the wangling of the death certificate

It was very well planned too. Good staff work. Everything was foreseen and no detail, however insignificant, neglected or left to chance. It was meant to go like clockwork and it did. And yet when it comes to the funeral he dismisses it in a sentence. All he says is"—Drury referred to his notes—"'we were then to fake a funeral.' Why, man, that was by far the hardest part of the lot! How are you going to get a strange undertaker to conduct a funeral when you haven't got a corpse for him? If he had sufficient intelligence to plan out all the rest of it so carefully he must have foreseen that difficulty, and yet he wants us to believe that he trusted to luck to overcome it. I'm afraid that cat won't jump, Ridley. As far as I can see it is an absolutely insoluble problem unless he was going to bribe the undertaker and his men, and that would be far too risky. But if he knew that there was going to be a corpse available it simplifies the whole thing."

"It does," exclaimed Ridley. "And if you are going to make sure that there is one available, why not select the most valuable victim?"

"Exactly. And my fifth point is that we have some evidence to prove that he did select him deliberately. Evidence this time, mind you, not guess-work. We have the note he sent to

Levinsky asking him to come round on business, whereas he says in this statement that his arrival was purely a coincidence. That is the most important point of the lot because it definitely proves that he is lying. He's banking on that note being destroyed. Ridley, he's an ingenious devil. He's trying to put us off the scent by giving us a story that is plausible on the face of it, hoping that a full confession of half the truth is going to stop us looking for the other half."

"Another thing—whether Levinsky went to his house by appointment or by chance, why should he suddenly die in the street? The medical evidence proved that he was a healthy man."

"Y—es. I'd thought of that, but I hadn't put it down because we can't lay much stress on it. Why should he die at all if he was healthy? The medical chappies are completely flummoxed and can't find any cause of death at all, natural or unnatural, and so on that count Laidlaw is just as entitled to say that he died in the street as we are to say that he was murdered. Well, I think that's about all, isn't it? Unless you've found out anything else?"

Drury obviously expected the answer no. His tone rather suggested that if he could not find

any more faults it was not likely that the local inspector could. The latter, however, consulted his envelope again.

"There's the paraffin wax," he said doubtfully.

"What about it?" replied Drury. "It explains that mysterious wax-lined syringe you found in the house, but I don't see that it proves anything. He could have used it, as he claims, on an accidental body just as well as on a victim."

"He could; but why should a doctor on holiday have a serum syringe and a block of paraffin wax with him, unless he knew he was going to use them? He might have a hypodermic syringe and a pocket case of morphia, because they might come in useful any time, but the other things want some explaining." Ridley's tone gained confidence as he perceived that he had, with beginner's luck, beaten the expert at his own game.

"One up for you, Ridley. I'd missed that. Have you thought of anything else?"

"No."

"Neither have I. But these seven points are enough."

"Enough to charge him with murder?"

"No. We don't know the cause of death, and until we can prove that the defence would always set up a successful plea of natural death; but

they make it a moral certainty that he was murdered and it is our job to find out the method. If we could only give the pathologists a lead and give them some idea what to look for, they might be able to find something they had overlooked."

"Perhaps Laidlaw really has found some undiscoverable poison——"

"Oh, you've been reading the 'Gazette.' Cæsar Borgia reincarnated and that sort of thing."

Ridley looked rather sheepish.

"Isn't it possible?" he demanded. "After all, the chap is a doctor."

"All things are possible," admitted Drury. "My name might be Pumblechook, but it isn't. Laidlaw is a general practitioner, and always has been one, as far as we know, and he probably knows as much about poisons as other general practitioners, but he's not likely to be an expert on the subject. Still, we don't know. It would be as well to run down to Barhaven and search for the hidden laboratory where he distils his untraceable Aqua Toffana!"

"Don't be an ass," said the goaded Ridley.

"And I'll have a look round at Holm Lea as well and see if I can find anything you've missed."

CHAPTER XIII

HOLM LEA AGAIN

SHORTLY before nine o'clock next morning Drury left his lodgings to carry out his proposed examination of the empty house in Castle Road. A couple of taxis were standing on a rank close by and a ten-minute bus service ran very conveniently almost from door to door, but it was a beautiful sunny morning and his muscles were still so stiff from the exertions of the Birmingham chase that he preferred to walk. As he was nearing his destination he met Dr. Osborne, also on foot and carrying a small attaché-case.

"Good morning, inspector," said the latter cheerily. "Lovely day, isn't it?"

"It is. Far too nice to be working. Is your car out of action?"

"No. I often walk to see patients when the weather is fine, that is, if they don't live too far away and if I'm not busy. Work is very slack just at present. It is too late for winter epidemics

among the residents and too early for visitors, so I have plenty of time on my hands."

"Could you spare me a few minutes of it? I wanted to ask you a few more questions."

"Yes, by all means. I have nothing special to do for the next hour and a half. Will you come along to my house?"

"Well, I am going to Laidlaw's to have a look round, and it will probably be rather a long job, so I wanted to get there as soon as possible. Some other time, perhaps."

"I'll walk along with you, then, and you can go on with your catechism on the way. What was it you wanted to ask me about?"

"About Laidlaw's illness. You heard the evidence at the inquest, of course?"

"Yes. But I should like to know what happened to the chap. I was very disappointed when the coroner stopped the foreman asking questions about him, because the whole thing has been an absolute mystery to me. All I know is that the man I attended apparently disappeared into thin air after he died and another body was found in his coffin. Very refreshingly unconventional, no doubt, but I can't help puzzling about it."

"Well, doctor, I can relieve your curiosity to some extent, only don't tell anybody else about

it. The man you attended was Laidlaw right enough, but he did not die at all."

"Didn't die?"

"No. Like the old soldiers, he faded away and is at present in Birmingham Gaol."

"Well, I'm damned! Last time I saw him he was very ill. I gave a death certificate too. Oh, Lord!"

"The illness was a fraud, and the funeral was faked as well. He was going to use your certificate to draw his insurance money. That's all straightforward——"

"Oh, is it? If that is what you call straightforward, I'm glad I'm not a detective. However, go on."

"Anyway, we arrested him for that, and can prove it. But that is only the beginning. We want him for something much worse."

"My professional brother seems to have been putting his foot into it properly."

"The corpse in the wrong coffin was probably provided by your professional brother, as you call him, in order to make the funeral more lifelike, if one may use that word to describe a funeral. Our trouble is that he seems to have hit upon a most confoundedly efficient way of doing it, and I am going to Holm Lea to try and find out how he did do it. What I wanted to

ask you about was his illness. He has told us how he worked it, but we have to check every detail of his statement, as you can understand."

"I can't believe that it was not a real illness," said Osborne. "I never suspected anything."

"My dear sir, why should you? You don't go round suspecting your patients of wholesale malingering. You would soon lose them if you did. This chap had the knowledge to do it well, and you didn't know anything about his financial motives, so there was nothing fishy about it at all from your point of view."

"I am glad you think that, inspector. How the devil did he do it? I should like to know."

"He says he put some stuff into one eye to dilate the pupil—I've forgotten the name of it."

"Atropine?"

"Yes, that was it. Would that do it?"

"It would. It is the stuff ophthalmic surgeons use when they want to dilate the pupil so that they can see right to the back of the eye."

"He injected a dose of apomorphine into himself just before you came, and says that made him sick."

"It did. Lord! what a cute chap he is. Ever seen apomorphine used, inspector?"

"No."

"One-tenth of a grain injected under the skin

anywhere makes you throw up your very soul in about four minutes. Very reliable stuff."

"Then he says he faked a high temperature with a hot water bottle."

"By Jove, I remember Mrs. Laidlaw stopping me when I wanted to put the thermometer under his tongue. She told me some cock-and-bull story about him grinding his teeth, so I put it under his arm. I suppose the old devil had been nursing a hot bottle under each arm for half an hour or so. His wife seemed to be so upset, and she must have been laughing up her sleeve at me all the time."

"Now you know the whole story, doctor, could all his symptoms have been produced artificially?"

"Yes. Now I come to think of it they could. I remember saying to a friend of mine when I got home that it was an interesting case, because he had signs of meningitis with normal reflexes. I did not think much about it at the time, but just put it down to be an atypical case. Most of them are, you know. It is very rare to meet a case of any kind that fits in with the descriptions in the books. But now I can see that all the symptoms over which he had no control were normal."

By this time they had reached the end of Castle Road.

"Any objection to me coming in too, inspector?" queried Osborne. "What you have told me is so interesting that I should like to see the place again."

"No objection at all," said Drury, producing the front door key. "Doctors are always useful helpers in our job."

"Even B.F.'s like me?"

"Don't you worry about that, sir. I think anybody would have been taken in under the circumstances. If you'd known then one-tenth of what you know now, it would have been different. Anybody can spot last year's Derby winner."

Holm Lea was already acquiring that deserted and desolate look characteristic of unoccupied houses. The steps were unwashed, the lawn unmown and weeds were beginning to carpet the flower-beds with a covering of green.

"We will go up to the front bedroom first," remarked Drury, blowing the dust off a hat-peg before using it—for he was a married man, trained to be careful with his clothes. "That was where Levinsky's body was stored until it was used. One of the local police actually saw it there, but, like you, he was not suspecting anything and

took no notice. We had no idea then that Levinsky was dead."

"It was a wise precaution of Laidlaw's to disguise the face, or that visit might have given the show away. But of course he would have to do it for the benefit of the undertaker's men."

"This is the room. I suppose the invalid was here when you saw him?"

"Yes. In this bed."

"Let's get a window open and the blinds up for a start, and then have a look round."

Beginning at one corner Drury worked rapidly but systematically round the room, removing every picture from the walls and inverting every ornament on the mantelpiece. Even the clock was opened and investigated. The dressing-table and wardrobe were thoroughly ransacked, but yielded nothing of interest, and the searcher next turned his attention to the bed. Each layer of bed-clothes was removed separately until only the bare frame was left. Everything was quite normal. In no way discouraged, the inspector proceeded to fill his pipe, when his attention was arrested by a remark from Osborne.

"They were rather careless with their gramophone needles. Look here," and he pointed to a small cushioned arm-chair which stood be-

tween the bed and the door. Under it and around it were scores of small steel points.

"'M. Not very—puff—nice things—puff—for a bedroom floor—puff. Let's have a look at the chair next."

The inspector got up from the bed, brushed some ash off his coat and crossed over to his companion. He bent down and removed the cushion.

"Hallo, what's this?" he exclaimed. "Who has been boring holes in perfectly good furniture?"

The wooden chair seat had a hole in it somewhat to the left of the middle. It was about an inch in diameter, and had been bored fairly recently with a carpenter's brace and bit. On tilting the chair backwards another unusual feature was revealed. Two wooden brackets were screwed to the under side of the seat, one on each side, and a strong strip of wood joined them, passing under the hole about four inches below it. All this was invisible with the chair and cushion in their ordinary positions.

"What is it for?" asked Osborne.

"Don't know, I'm sure. But I want to know. If Levinsky was murdered in this house anything out of the ordinary needs explaining. What about the cushion?"

Osborne picked it up and handed it to him. There was a small tear in the cover, and, fitting the cushion in position, Drury found that the tear was immediately over the hole in the seat. He verified this by putting his finger through the hole, and as he did so a small metal object fell out of the cushion into his hand. He held it out and looked at it blankly.

"Wish I knew what that was," he murmured, half to himself.

"I can tell you that," replied Osborne at once. "It is something in my line. It is the butt end of a hypodermic needle with the needle itself broken off. Wait a minute and I will show you one like it." He dived into his coat pocket and produced a nickel-plated case, which he opened, revealing a metal-mounted glass syringe and a row of little tubes. From the end of the syringe he detached the needle and held it out.

"You see, the needle itself is a piece of very fine steel tubing, cut off at an angle to form the point, with the other end soldered into one of these little metal mounts which pushes on to the end of the syringe."

"I see. Thanks very much." Drury compared the two and there was no doubt that Osborne was correct. His accidental presence had saved a considerable amount of trouble in

getting the thing identified. "But why was it there? Laidlaw used a syringe to inject apomorphine into himself, and he used one—perhaps the same one—to inject paraffin into Levinsky; but why should part of the needle be in the cushion? It looks as if it had some connection with this hole in the seat."

"Where is the rest of the needle?" asked Osborne. "Is it in the cushion as well? Mind you don't prick yourself."

Drury felt cautiously and thoroughly, but could find no trace of it. He only noticed a slight stiffening of the fabric on the upper surface of the cushion, again over the hole, which he pointed out to Osborne.

"Look here, inspector, I've got an idea. You think Levinsky was murdered in this house?"

"Yes."

"Pre-arranged?"

"Probably. Laidlaw wrote him a note asking him to come round and see him."

"Well, suppose this is a sort of trap for him?"

"That is just what I am supposing, but I don't see how it works."

"I believe I do. I hope you don't think I am butting in."

"Not a bit. These syringes are the tools of your trade, and you can probably tell me something about them, just as I could tell you something you don't know about finger-prints."

"It would work like this." Osborne took out the hypodermic syringe from its case, fitted the needle on to it and pulled out the piston to its fullest extent. "If we lower the syringe through the hole in the seat like this, with the needle upwards, the end of the piston rod rests on the shelf underneath. A big twenty cubic centimetre syringe would fit better. The edges of the hole would support it, and it would stay in position by itself without wobbling about like this little one. By Jove! I've got one downstairs in my bag. I had been giving a dose of serum to a case of diphtheria when I met you. I'll fetch it."

He dashed off and clattered down the stairs, greatly excited, and returned with a glass of water in one hand and an enlarged edition of the pocket syringe in the other. He fitted a needle to the nozzle and drew up a little water into the barrel of the syringe.

"Imagine that is some sort of poison," he went on. "Now put it through the hole—it fits almost exactly. That's as it should be."

"I see what you are getting at now. If the cushion is put on top so that the needle sticks into it, Levinsky comes along in answer to the message and is shown into this room where

Laidlaw is in bed. He sits down in this chair, put ready by the bedside, gets the needle stuck into him, and before he can jump up his weight drives home the syringe and injects the stuff, the piston being fixed by the shelf."

"That's the idea."

"Very ingenious, doctor, and it happens to be, in a way, just what we were hoping to find. But is it practical? I grant you that it explains this contraption under the chair, and if we don't accept your theory I haven't any alternative to bring forward. I grant you that it explains this tear in the cushion and the stiff patch as well—that is where some of the stuff leaked out, I suppose. But remember that no poison was found in the body."

"I had forgotten that," admitted Osborne, somewhat dashed by this douche of cold fact.

"Still," continued the critic, "Laidlaw's statement has so many suspicious points in it that we hoped to find something of this sort—something to give the toxicologists a lead. So I should be only too pleased to accept your version of it, but we must think of all the possible objections first. As a medical man, can you think of any poisons that act almost immediately?"

"N—o. Prussic acid is about the only one."

"And they would have spotted prussic acid at once, so it can't be that. Now, suppose a slower poison was used. Put yourself in Levinsky's place. You sit down on a chair and get a needle stuck into your stern. What happens? Do you sit there with a sweet smile on your face? You do not. You get up and see what's bitten you, and you don't lose much time about it. And it wouldn't take you long to find out that contraption. Then you would pretty soon send for a doctor or the police, or both. We know he was not forcibly detained, or there would surely have been some signs of it on the body. As it is, the only sign of violence was a pair of broken glasses, which are pretty fragile things at the best of times. If you can answer these objections I'm with you."

Osborne was amazed at the way in which the inspector was able to bring forward a formidable array of criticisms on a subject which was, to him, foreign, and his opinion of him went up several degrees. He thought for a few moments and then smiled.

"I think I can answer all your conundrums this time," he said. "This is familiar ground to me and I really think I'm right."

"I hope you are."

"In the first place you said 'put ourselves in

Levinsky's place,' but you were doing the opposite and putting Levinsky in our place."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are suspicious. He wasn't. We know of the existence of this death-trap. He didn't. He was merely a visitor in the house, a business man coming to see a respectable client with whom he had already done business, and he was not expecting to be murdered any more than I was expecting a respectable patient to be a fraud. If he had had any suspicions he would not have come. Suppose you go into an invalid's bedroom on a business interview. You sit down in a chair and get a needle prick in the thigh. Of course you would jump up—but remember that it was night and probably the shaded bedlight was the only light in the room. Mrs. Laidlaw rushes forward with apologies, calls attention to the gramophone needles 'accidentally' upset on the floor and picks one, which she had ready in her hand, off his trousers. Then she brings up another chair, and there you are. She is quite capable of it. I've had some experience of her as an actress. Levinsky sits down again and Laidlaw keeps him talking until your slow poison, whatever it is, begins to take effect. It would be quite safe and simple really. A hypodermic needle looks rather a

fearsome weapon, but have you ever had one used on you?"

"Never."

"Well, take my word for it—and I would be prepared to say this in the witness-box—a new needle in good condition causes very little pain if it is put in quickly—sometimes none at all—and it would be inserted quickly if he sat on it. It would not hurt anything like as much as sitting on a gramophone needle. Of course if it is blunt or rusty it hurts like sin, but Laidlaw wasn't a fool and he would use a good one. If you like I can prove what I say. I have a new needle here in this case and I can try it on you."

"All right. I don't doubt your word, but, speaking as a layman, those needles look as though they could hurt a good deal."

"Roll your sleeve up," replied Osborne, flourishing his glittering syringe.

Drury did so, rather apprehensively. Osborne swabbed a little iodine on the skin, took a firm grip of the arm and poised the syringe. The inspector, who had once or twice tackled armed men without a tremor, shut his eyes and clenched his teeth. He heard a gentle chuckle.

"Get on with it," he said. "Don't keep me waiting."

"I've done it already."

"Go on! I don't believe you."

"Open your eyes, then, and look."

He opened them and saw the needle three-quarters of an inch deep in his arm.

"But I never felt anything at all!" he gasped.

"Didn't I say that it was sometimes quite painless? It isn't always. It all depends whether you hit on a sensitive patch of skin or not, and I was lucky enough not to do so this time. Perhaps you will admit now that Levinsky needn't necessarily have been frightened out of the house by it even if it hurt him a bit more than it hurt you?"

"In future," said Drury, still taken up by the novelty of a painless puncture, "I'll believe a medical witness whatever sort of a damned lie he tells me! You can wash out my objections to your theory, doctor. As you say, he would not be suspecting anything. That is a very strong point."

"Yes, and a point that particularly appeals to me, because it let me down in my dealing with the Laidlaws, and I'm still rather sore about it," replied Osborne ruefully.

"At any rate you had the satisfaction of being diddled by one of your own profession.

The thing we have to find out now is what brand of poison he used."

"I can't help you there. If the experts missed it I'm bunkered. Good heavens! It's ten o'clock and I have to give an anæsthetic at the other end of the town at half-past. I must go now. Thanks very much for letting me come with you. It has been awfully interesting."

"Don't thank me, doctor. Very much obliged to you for your help. If you are calling at home do you mind ringing up the police-station and asking them to send a car round to take this chair away? It is much too valuable to be left here."

"Right. I have to call for my car, anyway. I wonder if you will be able to find the rest of the needle?"

"I don't expect so. Quite probably it is still in Levinsky's leg. If it is it weaves another strand round Laidlaw's neck. Stop a minute, though. Wouldn't it have been found at the post-mortem if it had been there?"

"Not necessarily by any means. After all a needle prick is practically invisible on ordinary skin unless you know exactly where to look for it, and still more so when a person has been buried some time."

Drury continued his search patiently after

Osborne had gone, and spent the whole of the rest of the day in the house, but found nothing more of interest. The chair was removed by men sent from the station before he left and stored in safety along with Edward Derrington's indiscreet note, his finger-prints and the copy of Mrs. Laidlaw's letter.

CHAPTER XIV

THE POISON THAT IS NOT A POISON

THE day after the discoveries at Holm Lea Drury left by train for Barhaven, and was met on his arrival by Sergeant Jackson. Barhaven, as its name does not imply, is a small manufacturing town, so dirty and smoky that its neighbours are in the habit of referring to it as "'t place wheer 't sparrers fly backwards rooad to keep t' muck aht of their een." This is doubtless due to jealousy, as none of the surrounding towns have any claim to beauty, and most of them are just as dirty.

Like others of its kind Barhaven has been spoilt beyond all hope of redemption by the unrestricted individualism of the nineteenth century. Narrow, crooked streets laid out without plan and without any consideration for convenience, safety or health; dingy back-to-back houses crowded into courts and alleys of incredible ugliness with a complete disregard for light and air; noisy, smoky and odorous

factories scattered at random among the residential parts of the town—all lay under a perpetual pall of smoke from the maze of chimney-pots.

Desperate and expensive efforts were being made to rectify faults of fifty years' standing, and the twentieth-century pendulum had swung to the other extreme with a vengeance. The sins of the fathers were being paid for a thousandfold by their unfortunate descendants. Narrow streets which were death-traps to modern traffic were being widened at a fantastic cost. Men of moderate means, whose grandfathers could have built their stables half-way across the main road without exciting comment, were fleeced by garage proprietors because the local authority would not allow them to build garages in their own gardens unless they were masonry structures of such cathedral-like solidity as to be absolutely prohibitive in cost. Thousands of tons of coal were wasted every year in badly designed boilers and grates which poured forth incessantly the smoke clouds which overhung the town and shut out the sun. The Town Council, appalled by the resultant rickets and high death rate, took energetic steps to deal with the smoke question. Municipal sun-baths were installed at enormous expense and the

electricity works, old and inefficient, produced still more smoke in their effort to supply artificial sunlight in place of the real article which they were obscuring. The sun-baths did not pay. The ratepayers did. They had to. Everything was done to ensure the survival of the unfittest. It has been said that the world is full of willing people; some are willing to work and the others are willing to let them work. Prudent, hardworking people of the former type were compelled to limit their families very stringently in order to pay for the unrestrained and irresponsible multiplication of the shiftless, the half-witted and the diseased. In a word, Barhaven was a typical manufacturing town with rates at twenty-six shillings in the pound.

The two officers walked through the grimy and depressing streets, and Drury explained to his guide the reason for his visit.

"The only trouble about a search at his house," said the sergeant, "is that it has been occupied by the locum and the maids ever since the Laidlaws went away, so we don't know what has been interfered with and what hasn't."

"Well, it is not the site of the crime, so perhaps it doesn't matter much. The kind of evidence I want to find is not likely to have been destroyed, and in any case we can't help it."

"What are you going to look for, sir?"

"Anything I can find that seems to throw any light on the crime, but what we particularly want to know is what sort of poison was used. The analysts say that it was not used at all, but they could not find any other cause for death, so they may be wrong. We think they are wrong from other evidence."

"Do you really, sir? That doesn't often happen, does it?"

"No, it does not. The poison experts take a lot of beating, and I have sufficient faith in them to believe that they will be able to help us if we can only give them a lead. I think we can do it because we have found an apparatus suitable for injecting poison."

The sergeant nodded his head with great solemnity.

"It would be easy for him, being a doctor——" he began.

"Confound it, man!" interrupted Drury, remembering that Ridley had expressed the same opinion. "Why does everybody think that the ordinary G.P. knows enough about poisons to defeat the experts? It isn't reasonable. It isn't possible. And yet," he admitted reluctantly, "it looks as if he'd done it. Anyhow, what I shall do is to try and find out if Laidlaw was

particularly interested in any poison or bought specially large amounts of any. I think I will go over his poison register and his drug bills to start with."

Holly Grove was, like the majority of doctors' houses, a corner house. It was hideously ugly, built of smoke-grimed red brick by an architect who would have made a name for himself as a designer of convict prisons. The front door opened direct on to the pavement, and the lower halves of the downstairs windows were fitted with frosted glass for privacy. An old red lamp, which from the name on it and its generally dilapidated appearance had evidently belonged to Dr. Laidlaw's predecessor, hung drunkenly over the side door.

Sergeant Jackson rang the bell and explained their errand to the vinegar-faced housekeeper who admitted them. She showed them straight into the consulting-room, which was deserted, the locum having gone out to do the morning's visits. It was a large but somewhat shabby room, fitted with the usual desk, couch and weighing-machine. The walls were covered with varnished paper which had faded to the peculiar drab yellowness characteristic of this loathsome material in its old age; the paint was lustreless and blistered; the ceiling, surrounded by irri-

tating and useless " ornamental " plaster cornices, badly needed a coat of whitewash. Opposite the door a dusty chart of eye-testing types hung on the wall. On the mantelpiece were a small glass cabinet of surgical instruments, an old X-ray photograph and a book of panel certificates. Across one end of the room was a glass and wood partition about six feet high. A row of bottles protruding over the top of this showed that it was the dispensary. Drury went behind this screen and switched on the light. Occupying three sides of the compartment were shelves filled with rows of bottles bearing the conventional dog-Latin labels, and the fourth side was taken up by a sink, a table and a small desk. On the table was a pile of wrapping paper and a dispensing balance, and on the desk a book entitled " Dangerous Drugs Act. Register."

Looking through this Drury found that it contained a record of purchases of opium, morphia, cocaine and heroin. Not knowing much about these he put it aside for further investigation. In the corner of the dispensary was a box labelled " Outfit for the estimation of blood sugar by MacLean's method." It was a nicely made box, quite new and fitted with a lock. The key was in place, so Drury turned it and opened the lid. Inside were beakers, flasks, pipettes,

funnels and other chemical apparatus, each article fitting neatly into a clip or space provided for it. There were also about a dozen bottles of chemical reagents. Drury remembered his joking remark to Ridley about concealed laboratories and sent Sergeant Jackson, as a matter of form, to search the whole house for traces of other apparatus of a similar kind. As he expected, that officer returned with a negative report. Apart from a spirit lamp and a few test tubes on the dispensing table the box of glassware represented the only traces of a laboratory, and it was obviously designed and sold as a complete unit—an outfit for the performance of one particular test. He was not disappointed, for he knew enough about matters medical to realize that the average general practitioner has neither the time nor the inclination to dabble in chemistry, any tests, other than the simplest routine examinations, being almost invariably referred by him to a hospital or laboratory.

In one corner of the surgery proper was a sectional book-case filled with medical works, most of them being the usual students' textbooks. Drury, pursuing his policy of searching for subjects of interest to the suspected man, turned his attention to these and made a careful

list of the titles. They were arranged in no special order; Gray's Anatomy was placed next to Osler's text-book of Medicine, and a zoology notebook was nestling between a treatise on diseases of the skin and a pamphlet on Infant Feeding. Volume I of Warren's Surgery was in the top row, and Volume II on the shelf below. Evidently Dr. Laidlaw had not bought many new books since he qualified; the majority of them were twelve to fifteen years old, well thumbed and rather out of date. The bottom shelf, however, had a patch of colour among the faded bindings, and on removing the four end books, two of them still in their paper wrappers, Drury found that all of them had been recently published, and all of them were on the same subject—diabetes.

At this moment the door opened and a girl came in. Short skirted, silk stockinged and fur gloved, she entered with an air of proprietorship, but the tune which she was humming came to a sudden stop as she saw a uniformed police officer and a strange man apparently spring-cleaning the bookshelves.

Sergeant Jackson, though deprived of half his imposing official presence by being helmetless and very dusty as to the hands, was equal to the occasion.

"You are Dr. Laidlaw's locum, miss, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. May I ask——?"

"This is Inspector Drury of Scotland Yard, and we have a warrant to search here."

"Oh, and what have I been doing now?" she asked, her face relaxing into a pleasant smile.

"Nothing, as far as we know, Dr.—er——" replied Drury, also smiling.

"Freeman. Doris Freeman."

"We are merely investigating Dr. Laidlaw's affairs."

"I see. You don't mind if I use the dispensary, I suppose? I have this morning's medicines to make up."

"Not at all. Don't let us interfere with your work."

Dr. Freeman opened her handbag, took out her visiting list, fountain pen, shingle comb and powder box and, thus equipped for dispensing, disappeared behind the partition, followed by an admiring glance from the sergeant, who was unmarried and impressionable. She emerged again as Drury was wiping the dust off his hands after completing his inventory.

"Do you know Dr. Laidlaw well, Miss Freeman?" he asked.

"No, hardly at all," she replied. "There's a towel and some soap in the dispensary if you want a wash. He went away to Southbourne the day I came here, and I only saw him for about an hour. He just showed me where things were kept and how he kept his books and a few things of that sort."

"Did he specialize in anything?"

"No. Purely general practice. Why?"

"I thought he seemed to be very interested in diabetes, judging by these books."

"Perhaps so. I suppose most doctors have their likes and dislikes. Personally I hate heart cases and I like infectious diseases. Oh, now you remind me of it, he has a blood-sugar outfit as well as those books, but I am sure I don't know why. I have been here six weeks and I have not come across a single case of diabetes yet."

Drury was interested. He realized quite clearly that he had found what he was looking for—something unusual, though it was not yet clear whether it was a fact of any importance or not. From the look of the consulting-room Dr. Laidlaw was not in the habit of spending much money on equipment of any sort, and yet here were four new books and a new and rather elaborate set of apparatus, all for use in a disease which was not very common in his practice.

"I saw that apparatus," he said, "but I didn't know what it was. What do you do with it?"

"You take samples of blood and find out how much sugar there is in them."

"Isn't it a usual thing for a doctor to have?"

"I shouldn't think many of them bother with it. It is used a lot in hospital, of course, but in private work you don't get much use for it in any one practice, and I shouldn't have thought it was worth while buying the apparatus. It must cost three or four pounds at least. Besides, each test takes half an hour to do. No, most people rely on the old test that you can do in half a minute with a spirit lamp and a test tube."

"Can you explain why he should want all these new books on the same subject?" inquired Drury, pointing to the four volumes on diabetes which lay where he had left them on the desk.

"Well, I can and I can't. The treatment of diabetes has altered so much in the last few years that his old books will be quite out of date, so I can quite understand his getting a new one. But I don't see why he should want four. Two of them are quite big ones too. Still, it isn't a crime for a doctor to buy medical books, is it?"

"No," admitted Drury absently, picking up

one of the books. "They look as if he hadn't read them much."

He opened it at random and saw the heading "Chapter 7. Insulin Treatment," which recalled to his mind various articles in the daily press.

"I suppose that is what you meant when you said that the treatment has altered. Insulin is new stuff, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Miss Freeman, looking over his shoulder. "Blood sugar testing and insulin were new when I was doing my hospital work. My chief was very keen on diabetes and was always talking about them. We used to get fed up with them and with his favourite story. It was really not bad the first time you heard it, but it got very threadbare. It was about an inattentive student in the wards, and his chief, seeing that he wasn't listening, suddenly asked him for the cause of diabetes. He jumped and, pretending he had heard the question, replied that he did know but he'd forgotten. The physician looked round the rest of the class and said solemnly, 'What a pity, gentlemen. Here is the only man who ever knew the cause of diabetes and he's forgotten it.' Then he used to explain that the tale had rather lost its point nowadays, because so much more is known about it."

Drury picked up the second book while the garrulous Dr. Freeman was talking and opened it. Here also he saw the heading "Chapter 4. Modern Treatment. Insulin."

"They all seem very much the same to me," he commented, putting it back and passing on to the third. "Hm, here it is again. We can't get away from it."

"Chapter 9. Insulin Therapy," were the first words that met his eye. A thought struck him and he took up the three books again. Looking at the first one he could see that the smooth newness of the guillotined page edges was soiled and irregular in one place. At this place he opened it, to reveal Chapter VII again. He tried the next and the next. In each the dirty page edges corresponded to the insulin chapter. Finally he took the fourth volume, which he had not yet examined, and noticed that it, like the others, had one place at which it had obviously been opened. He shut his eyes and allowed it to fall open, mentally betting on the result. He won his bet, for the page was headed "The Effect of Insulin on the Blood Sugar."

"Got another ten minutes to spare, Dr. Freeman?" he asked.

"I think so," replied that lady, consulting her wrist-watch. "Lunch is at one o'clock and

it is only twenty minutes to. I daren't be late, though. The housekeeper is a terror."

"She looks it," agreed Drury sympathetically, producing his cigarette-case. "Will you have one?"

"Thanks."

"I won't get you into trouble with the powers that be. I want you to tell me about insulin, that's all."

"Why, have you got diabetes?"

"I hope not. But I have a very good reason for asking. I want to know all about it. Is it a poison or a drug or a food or what?"

"Really, inspector," replied Dr. Freeman, smiling through a cloud of cigarette smoke, "you don't give me credit for knowing much if you expect me to tell you all about it in ten minutes."

"All the more important details, then."

"All right. It's a long story and it will have to be very condensed. Have you ever heard of hormones?"

"No. You can assume that I know nothing and start right at the beginning."

"Well, the body has a nervous system which is like a telegraph office. Messages can be flashed along the nerves from one part to another practically instantaneously. It also has another

and slower method of communication, which corresponds to sending messages by post. A gland in one part of the body can form a substance and empty it into the blood, which acts as postman and carries it round to act on another part. Got that?"

"Yes. That's quite clear."

"These substances are called hormones and are really drugs made by the body itself for its own use. One of them is insulin. Its presence has been suspected by physiologists for a long time, but it was only identified recently—three or four years after the war. It is made in a gland and sent into the blood, and its function is to enable the body to make use of sugar. It is constantly being produced and constantly being used up. If you like you can compare the body to a furnace which burns sugar as fuel and the insulin is the forced draught. Now suppose something goes wrong with the gland where it is made. The supply of insulin is too small and the body cannot burn its sugar properly—that's diabetes. In other words, a diabetic is a person who is short of insulin, and because of the shortage the unburnt sugar that he can't use circulates in the blood. Insulin can now be made commercially, and so there you are. Instead of starving your patient to keep down

his blood sugar you give him insulin and put him in exactly the same position as a normal person."

"It cures diabetes, then?" put in Drury, who had been listening so intently that his cigarette had gone out.

"No. I should have said normal for the time being. You see, there ought to be a continuous supply, as it is being used all the time, but when you give it artificially the supply is intermittent. You inject a dose and it restores things to normal until that dose is used up, but that is all."

"Is it dangerous stuff?"

"It can be, but not if it is carefully used. The normal amount of sugar in the blood ought to be ten parts in ten thousand, and the adjustment is very delicate. If the amount rises to twelve in ten thousand, due to too little insulin, the person has diabetes; if it drops to seven or eight in ten thousand, due to too much, alarming symptoms come on and the patient collapses. So the dose has to be very exact and varies for each patient. That box of apparatus over there is to measure the blood sugar so that you can form some idea of what dose to give, and also judge what the effect of it is. If you give an overdose and bring the percentage too low you can give sugar to eat as an antidote. Here endeth

the lesson. There will be no collection," concluded the young and flippant doctor.

"It would be possible to kill a person with insulin, then?"

"Yes, if you gave sufficient."

"So that it may be described as a poison?"

"In that sense, yes; in another sense, no. It is a normal and essential secretion of the body, and you can't live without it. Legally, I don't think it comes under the Poisons Act."

Drury, though naturally unemotional, had great difficulty in restraining his excitement. The last remark he never heard at all. The legal aspect of insulin failed to interest him, for his acute and critical brain had seen in the previous sentence the final link in the chain of evidence. A poison that was not a poison. A normal constituent of the human body, yet capable of causing death. No wonder the analyst had missed it! It was a Heaven-sent solution to an apparently insoluble problem, a solution which reconciled the two irreconcilables—the police evidence that poison had been used and the medical evidence that it had not. He gasped at the ingenuity of it. To use one of the body's own drugs to cause death was a device that entitled its originator to a high place in the annals of crime. Compared with him administrators of

arsenic were mere bunglers, and even the users of the modern alkaloids were the veriest amateurs.

"One more question, doctor. How is the stuff given?"

"It must be injected under the skin. It has no effect if it is given by the mouth, because it is digested and destroyed. That is its great disadvantage. It will only work if it is put direct into the blood in imitation of the natural supply."

Drury thought of the arm-chair and the tell-tale cushion. Now he knew why this rather cumbersome device was necessary. With a sigh of content he rose.

"I shan't trouble you much more now, doctor," he said. "I want to take the poison register with me, although I don't think we shall need it now, and I want the names of the wholesale houses from which Dr. Laidlaw got his drugs."

"You'll find their names and addresses in the poison book, I think," replied Dr. Freeman. "Let me have a look at it."

She leaned over so that her beautifully waved hair brushed the inspector's face and he smelt the faint scent of Fleurs d'Été. "Yes, there they are. Anything else?"

"These four books on diabetes. That's the

lot, I think." He gathered them up and shook hands heartily with the young doctor. "Thanks very much for your information. It may interest you to know that you have helped me to finish one of the trickiest cases I've ever had in thirty years' experience."

The housekeeper put her head in at the door.

"Lunch's been on the table five minutes," she said in an icy voice.

Dr. Freeman fled hurriedly.

CHAPTER XV

THE RE-EXAMINATION

"HE may need very careful handling, Drury," said Chief Inspector McCarthy. "These expert witnesses are a bit touchy sometimes, especially if they think we are butting in on their own special preserves. So make it quite clear to him that we have got our additional information on non-medical grounds and avoid treading on his toes as far as possible."

The above fragment of conversation took place at Scotland Yard. Drury had paid a flying visit to headquarters to lay his recent discoveries before his superiors in order to induce them to authorize the next step, which was nothing less than to exhume the body again.

"You'd better go along and see him yourself before you go back to Southbourne," went on McCarthy. "Of course, however peeved he is, he can't stop us doing it, but we want to keep on good terms with our experts."

And so Drury found himself in Sir James

Martin's private laboratory in the Pathological Department of St. Martha's Hospital. It was a large and airy room opening out of the main laboratory, where a crowd of medical students were working at the benches, busily engaged with stains and culture tubes of *Staphylococcus aureus* and other more or less innocuous microbes suitable for inexpert handling. Incubators and water-baths were ranged along one side of it, and the wall under the windows was occupied by a long bench fitted with sinks and water taps, and littered with racks of Petri dishes and tubes of culture media. At one end was a power-driven centrifuge rotating in its shield at five thousand revolutions a minute, and at the other an elaborate rocking microtome for cutting sections.

Sir James himself was seated at a large and very beautiful microscope, which had been sent to him for testing purposes by a German firm of international repute as makers of lenses. It so happened that it incorporated a new device which was just what he required in order to complete a piece of research work which had come to a standstill, and so he was in a very good temper.

"Good morning, inspector," he said, switching off the centrifuge. "Got another case for me?"

"Not exactly, sir. You remember the Southbourne man?"

"I do. Not likely to forget him in a hurry. It isn't often one comes across such a complete pathological mystery. What's the latest?"

By this time the high-pitched whine of the centrifuge had slowed down into an expiring hum, and conversation was easier.

"We have found some evidence which makes us think that something was administered hypodermically," replied Drury, lowering his voice to suit the altered conditions. "And we can make a good guess what it was."

"Can you really? What poison have I missed?"

"Insulin."

There was a dead silence in the room, broken only by a little squeal from the laboratory outside as a woman student upset a bottle of carbol-fuchsin—the most indelible of all stains—on to a new pair of silk stockings. Sir James glanced at his new microscope with its fifty pounds' worth of polished brass and shiny enamel glittering under the shaded electric light, and then looked comically at the inspector and burst out laughing.

"I take off my hat to the modern criminal,"

he said at length. "What a beautiful idea! Are you sure of it?"

"Well, sir, not absolutely. We want you to re-examine and prove it for us. Personally I don't think there is much doubt about it, though," and Drury recounted his researches at Dr. Laidlaw's homes, temporary and permanent.

Sir James listened with great interest and was immensely pleased with the description of the chair.

"The Borgias' ring brought up to date," he commented appreciatively. "Well, inspector, if you are right it should mean promotion for you, and it will give me the material for a very interesting paper. I have to read one before the Royal Society of Medicine next month, and I was just wanting a good subject. Actually a really original crime! I didn't think there was such a thing. It wouldn't have been possible ten years ago, because there was no such stuff as insulin in existence then. It is certainly the first time it has ever been used for criminal purposes, and it will be the last time it ever takes me in. As to your part in it, do you know the first thing I am going to do when I get home to-night?"

"No."

"Burn all my books! It isn't safe to have a

library with people like you about. Dash it all, what could be more natural than for a doctor to buy new books on diabetes in his eagerness to keep up with modern improvements ? "

" That's what Dr. Laidlaw seemed to think, sir, since he didn't trouble to destroy them. By the way, there is another thing we want you to examine for as well as the insulin."

Drury outlined the nature of his second line of inquiry, and Sir James listened with renewed interest. The inspector was relieved to find that his news had been taken so well, though he had not, like McCarthy, anticipated trouble. He had had enough experience of scientific witnesses to know that the really big men, though more likely to be right than the second-rate, were always less unwilling to admit a mistake or an error of judgment.

" I can bring a blood sugar estimation outfit with me and do a rough test on the spot," resumed the pathologist. " It will be interesting to know the approximate result as soon as possible. And then I can take samples away with me and confirm it."

" Isn't it possible to test for the insulin itself ? "

" No. It is not an element like arsenic or mercury, or even a comparatively simple compound like morphia or the other alkaloids. It is a very complex substance which is formed only in the bodies of men and animals, and it cannot be made in the laboratory or identified except by its action on the body."

" I thought it could be made commercially," put in Drury, mindful of what Dr. Freeman had said.

" It can be extracted commercially," corrected Sir James. " It is a product of the abattoir, like thyroid extract or meat-juice. What I meant was that it cannot be made synthetically. If we find that the blood sugar is very much less than normal," he went on, reverting to his former line of thought, " that is sufficient proof of its presence. What about the apparatus for the other test ? I can't very well bring that with me ; it is much too cumbersome."

" The local hospital have a portable outfit which they use in the wards for patients who can't be moved, and the secretary promised to lend it to us."

" Good."

Nothing more remained except to fix the time for the examination, after which Drury left the hospital and went home for the rest of the day. Ellie and her inseparable friend were playing in the garden and ran to the gate to meet him.

Young as they were, they had learnt to accept his irregular appearances and departures as perfectly normal.

"Come and look at our snowman, daddy!" screamed the former excitedly.

"Right you are. Where did you get the snow? I haven't seen any lately."

"We got some water and a lot of dirt and made him out of mud, and pretended he was snow."

"I see. Was there much mud left when you'd finished mixing it?"

"No, only a teeny little bit, and we had to make some more. How did you know that, uncle?"

The honorary acting-uncle looked at their boots and laughed.

"You'll catch it when you get in."

"O—oh, and I've got my second best boots on too. Will you clean them, daddy?"

"Yes; but I want some tea first. Take them off outside and I'll carry you in."

He went into the house with one on each shoulder and made them happy by promising (subject to their respective mothers' approval) that they should stay up an extra half-hour because they had seen so little of him lately.

His stay was all too short, for he had to catch

an early train in the morning, and ten o'clock found him back at the Southbourne Mortuary.

"Have they sent over from the hospital yet?" he asked the attendant.

"No, sir, but they promised it would be here by ten. They said they would send their small portable apparatus and a man who knows how to work it. Oh, perhaps this is it."

A small motor-van shot into the yard and drew up with a jerk close to the mortuary. The driver stopped his engine, jumped down and opened the doors at the back of the vehicle, revealing a white-coated man wearing a celluloid collar and an anxious expression.

"I told you to go slow and mind the bumps," said this individual in an aggrieved tone. "It took me all my time to keep it from getting broken. Fair chucked us about, you did. If chaps like you had a load of bricks to deliver you'd smash 'em. Even if you had balloon tyres on," he added as a parting shot.

The driver, either from lofty disdain or from inability to think of a suitable reply, ignored these reflections upon his skill and contented himself with helping to unload the van. A large wooden cabinet with a marble top fitted with switches and ammeters was first lifted out and deposited on the ground. The white-coated man,

distrusting the heavy-handed driver, got down and wheeled this into the mortuary himself. He then returned to the car and came back with a large glass bulb, something like an overgrown electric light bulb, which he carried with great care as though it was something very costly, as indeed it was. The driver, who obviously wanted to watch the proceedings, hovered round the mortuary door until he was gently but firmly ushered out by Ridley, whereupon he reluctantly retired to his van and disconsolately smoked Woodbines until his services were again required. Meanwhile the hospital attendant had connected his apparatus to a plug in the wall and was making it produce long and crackly sparks, partly to see if it was in working order after its journey and partly to impress his audience.

Sir James Martin arrived a few minutes later, this time with only one suit-case and no assistant. He nodded affably to the two inspectors, opened the case and took out his apron and gloves.

"It is a good thing for humanity in general," he said, rubbing french chalk into his hands so that the rubber gauntlets would slip on easily, "that Laidlaw was not as successful in deceiving you as he was with me."

"It was easier for us than it was for you," replied Drury. "He did the medical part of his

plan beautifully because he had the knowledge to do it, but he is only a beginner in crime and he left clues all over the place, though I must say that if it had not been for Ridley here he would have got away with it. None of these clues would have even been looked for if Ridley had not traced Levinsky to the house. I suppose Laidlaw did not clear up after him as carefully as he might have done because he thought his scheme was so original that there was no possibility of failure."

"And he was not far wrong," said Sir James. "Is this the chair you found in the house?"

"Yes, sir. We brought it over here so that you could see it."

Drury lifted the cushion and exhibited the contrivance. It now had a syringe fitted in place and the method of its working was visible at a glance.

"The hole is on the left side of the chair as you look at it, so the needle should be in the right thigh if it is there at all. Everything ready now?"

"Yes, sir," replied the white-coated man, who had been hovering about in the background, fiddling with his switches and wires. He wheeled up his cabinet to the side of the slate-topped table and swung the glass tube, suspended in

an adjustable bracket, to the side of the sheet-covered body.

"Here is the screen, sir." He handed to the pathologist an object resembling a picture frame. The latter took it and turned back the sheet.

"Put the lights out," he ordered.

Ridley pulled down the blinds and turned off the switch by the door.

"On," said Sir James in the darkness.

A switch clicked and the apparatus started to hum. A greenish glow came from the glass tube and the peculiar acrid smell of ozone made its presence agreeably felt above the other odours. For some minutes Sir James waited, to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. Drury, who was an imaginative man, felt the dramatic quality of the scene to the full. He saw, outlined in the dim glow from the X-ray tube, not the prosaic figure of the Home Office pathologist, spectacled and slightly bald, but the avenging figure of Justice tearing from the grave secrets which were to place the rope round the neck of a murderer. It did not occur to him at the moment that his own part in the affair was at least as important, if not more so, and that without his aid the expert would have failed—had in fact failed—in his quest. It is always the other man's job which is the more romantic.

The slight flickering stopped and the hum of the X-ray apparatus settled down to a steady note. Sir James busied himself over the slate slab, tilting his frame first one way and then the other. Finally he held it motionless and gave a satisfied little grunt.

"You are right, Drury," he said. "I congratulate you. Come and have a look at it, but don't tread on that high tension wire. We don't want another inquest, nor do we want to break the hospital's property."

Drury approached cautiously, feeling his way in the darkness, and saw a pointing finger dimly outlined in the green glow.

"This long dark shadow is the thigh bone," explained the pathologist. "That is the hip joint, and there"—he pointed to another part of the X-ray screen a few inches lower down—"is your needle. Look and see with the eye of science what you have already seen with the eye of imagination. We will photograph it first and then get it out."

The attendant stepped forward with the plates, ready in their carriers, under his arm.

"I will take it in two positions," said Sir James. "From front to back and from side to side. The first plate fixes the position in

two planes of space, length and breadth, and the side-to-side one reveals the third plane—depth. That is the only way to localize a foreign body."

In a few moments the two photographs were taken, each one in duplicate in case the first plate was not successful. The lights were turned up again, the X-ray outfit pushed aside and the pathologist took up his knife and forceps. As the exact situation of the fragment of needle was known it was found and extracted with very little difficulty, washed and handed to Drury. He had ready in his hand the needle mount which had been discovered in the chair cushion, and he immediately placed the two pieces in contact.

"They fit exactly," he said laconically. The mount still preserved its unblemished nickel plating, whereas the rest of the needle was dull and blackened, but the two fragments, even to the layman's eye, made a perfect hypodermic needle as they lay in the palm of his hand. Sir James examined them with interest and then left Drury gloating over his treasure-trove while he put away his instruments.

"Now the next step," said he. "I will take samples of blood and estimate the percentage of sugar in them. I have brought down the apparatus for a rough preliminary test, so that we can do it at once."

The samples were duly collected and all of them except one carefully sealed and packed away in the suit-case, the pathologist working with deliberate and unhurried calm.

"Sorry to be so long about it," he remarked, noticing Drury's imperfectly concealed impatience, "but I must collect these specimens carefully or they would be no use. You look like a dog waiting to go for a walk, Drury."

"I feel like it, sir. This is the final stage of several weeks' hard work with endless complications and disappointments, and it feels good to be getting to the end of it."

"I can quite understand your feelings. Don't say hard work, though; it sounds too much like unskilled labour. An artist should never call his work hard."

Drury flushed with pleasure. This was praise indeed from Sir James, who was notoriously a hard taskmaster.

"Can we adjourn somewhere else to do the test?" the latter went on. "No good stopping here longer than necessary."

He spoke truly. The hand of death lay even more heavily on the body than at the previous

examination, and the removal to the Bath Manager's office was a welcome change.

Sir James produced from his suit-case an outfit very similar to the one Drury had seen in Dr. Laidlaw's surgery and began to spread out on the table an imposing array of apparatus. He began operations by disconnecting the gas-ring on which the Bath Manager brewed his tea and affixing to the pipe a Bunsen burner. The one remaining sample was put into a flask, other liquids were added to it in carefully measured amounts and it was boiled, filtered, reboiled and transferred from one vessel to another in a mystifying manner.

"I take it that your case is complete if this analysis turns out as we expect?" asked Sir James.

"Absolutely. We know the motive and the method and there is plenty of proof to connect Laidlaw with Levinsky. The only thing I don't understand—but it is quite a minor point—is why Laidlaw wanted a blood sugar outfit."

"It is almost essential if you are treating a person with insulin, so that you don't overdose him," explained Sir James abstractedly, his eyes fixed upon the watch which was timing the boiling of one of his solutions.

"But he wasn't treating a patient and he

wanted to overdose him." Drury could not refrain from speaking irritably to the man who had apparently completely forgotten that he was engaged in investigating a case of suspected murder.

"Of course. How silly of me!"

"I suppose he must have used it in a legitimate way in his practice, after all. Still, I should have liked to be able to connect it with the crime, because it was the presence of that outfit and the books which put me on to the track of the insulin."

"I think I can explain it," said the pathologist, shutting his watch and returning it to his pocket. "I'm afraid I was thinking about this timing when you asked me before." He lit his pipe at the Bunsen burner—a thing which no pipe-lover should ever do if he values good briar—and leaned back in his chair. "If I was going to commit a murder in the same way," he continued meditatively, "I should first get all the information possible about the dosage of insulin. That was presumably why he bought those books. They would give a lot of information about the doses to be used in treatment, but naturally they would give no instructions how to kill a person with it. So he put them back in his bookcase as no good. He wouldn't bother to destroy

them, because medical books in a consulting-room are not exactly objects of suspicion, except to people like you ! "

" And what would he do next ? "

" Get some insulin and experiment on himself with it, aided by the testing outfit. He would be able to find out what amount was needed to make a normal person feel faint and ill."

" Surely he wouldn't dare to do that ? "

" Oh, yes. It would be quite safe. Insulin is not a poison with an irreversible action like prussic acid. It acts only by depriving the blood of the sugar which is essential to life. Directly the symptoms come on—they start with sweating and faintness—all he has to do is to eat some sugar or inject some and they disappear at once."

" But why should he want to find out the dose so exactly ? Surely that big syringe in the chair would hold enough ? "

" Yes, probably more than enough, but it would be necessary to use the smallest possible effective dose for several reasons. He had in any case to use a cumbersome apparatus in order to give the injection surreptitiously—that is about the only disadvantage in his method—and so he would want the needle prick to hurt

as little as possible. The less pain, the less risk of arousing suspicion. A large quantity of fluid injected suddenly hurts very considerably, whereas a small quantity would pass almost unnoticed. Also with a large amount there would be more risk of leakage, which might give the show away. Then after this small dose had begun to take effect it would be easy to give some more, perhaps, if the victim was still conscious, under the pretence of injecting a stimulant. Anything else you want explaining ? "

" No, sir. All the threads are joined up now ; only one or two small details have to be filled in by guess-work. For instance, Laidlaw says in his statement—which we know is intended to mislead us—that Levinsky came to Castle Road on foot. We think he came by car, and yet his car was found in his own garage. Presumably Laidlaw drove the car back himself."

Sir James was now running small quantities of liquid from a burette into a flask containing a deep blue fluid, shaking the flask after each addition. All at once the blue colour vanished as the contents of the flask reached their " end-point," and the liquid remained water white. He read off the amount used on the graduated scale of the burette and drew a printed table from his pocket.

"There ought to be one-tenth of one per cent of sugar in this sample," he said.

Drury nodded. Dr. Freeman had said the same.

"As a matter of fact there is"—Sir James adjusted his glasses and consulted his table, while Drury held his breath—"decimal nought nine five per cent."

"Which means?" asked Drury anxiously.

"That the blood sugar is practically normal and that the analysis directly contradicts all this ingenious work of yours," replied Sir James decisively.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ANALYTICAL LOOPHOLE

DRURY was stunned by the shock of the announcement, and for the the first time since his arrival in Southbourne experienced the feelings of depression and failure which had once or twice affected the more pessimistic Ridley. After endless uncertainties and perplexities he had felt absolutely sure that the end of the case was in sight, and now once more the ground was cut from under his feet and his cherished and laboriously constructed case collapsed like a house of cards.

"Are you sure, sir?" he asked tonelessly.

"Yes," said Sir James, "I'm afraid there is no doubt about it. I will use a more exact method for the other specimens, but this one is reliable enough for us if not for the witness-box."

"Can't there be a mistake anywhere?" reiterated Drury, grasping at a straw.

"No. I have had sufficient experience of this method to be able to rely on my results. It is

a tragedy when a beautiful theory is completely demolished by one inconvenient fact. It has happened to me several times, so I can sympathize with you."

"I don't think you know the whole story," began Drury. "I have told you bits of it, but I should like to summarize it for you, and then you will see why I am so anxious to find a flaw in this analysis."

"You can say what you like, but it can't alter the results, and it can't make me give an opinion contrary to my results." Sir James was growing slightly irritable at the inspector's importunity.

"Oh, I know that, sir, and I wasn't suggesting for a moment——"

"I know you weren't." Drury sounded so hurt that he was somewhat mollified. "Scotland Yard men are not in the habit of cooking their evidence as a rule."

"But I am morally certain that Laidlaw killed him," said Drury slowly and with emphasis, "and that's why I am so keen on proving it. If I can't prove it by fair means there's an end of the matter, but I am not going to give up hope until I have to. This is our case against him, sir. He had every inducement to kill Levinsky, because it provided him with the body which

was absolutely indispensable for the funeral, and it also doubled his winnings. Secondly, Levinsky was at his house by his invitation when he disappeared. Thirdly, Levinsky reappeared in Laidlaw's coffin, while Laidlaw himself cleared off and——"

"Laid low," put in the pathologist.

Drury dutifully raised a smile at the unworthy jest and continued. "That's a pretty suspicious set of circumstances to start with, isn't it?"

"It is. The most stringent Grand Jury would find a true bill on that alone."

"Add to that Laidlaw's evident interest in insulin, as shown by the blood sugar apparatus and by the four new books, each one soiled at the insulin chapter. On top of that a specially made contrivance suitable only for injecting something into an unsuspecting person was found at Holm Lea. The presumption becomes overwhelming, to my mind."

"I agree; but the analysis doesn't," said the courteous but unconvinced man of science.

"Also," continued Drury, desperately arraying his hard-won facts in support of his cherished theory, as a mother might fight for her child, "the apparatus was actually used on Levinsky."

"Yes. Strong point that. The broken needle proves it. But the only deduction one can draw

from the analysis is that the syringe was empty when it was used."

"Why go to the trouble of all those preparations and then use an empty syringe?" asked Drury, reasonably enough. "Especially when he knew well enough that insulin was the ideal poison—certain not to be detected by an ordinary analysis."

"Yes, a beautiful theory," agreed Sir James meditatively and in a tone of less dogmatic opposition, "very strongly backed up by facts and very ably expounded. Up to a point it fulfils all the requirements of a scientific hypothesis. It explains all the facts and it even enabled you to predict the presence of a fact which you could not see—I mean the needle we have just photographed. That in itself is very strong evidence that it is correct. But it is unfortunately flatly contradicted by the one crucial fact which should prove it absolutely. That, in science, condemns a theory at once, however attractive it may be. But I must say that you have made out such a strong case that we must take extra special care to see that the crucial fact really is crucial."

"What! Do you mean that it may be wrong?"

"No. It is a fact, definite and unshakable,

but it might not be quite so important as we think. If I may make a suggestion, and if you don't think I am encroaching on your territory——"

"Not at all, sir. The more suggestions the better. I always believe in making use of the experts. That is what they are there for."

"I think I can see a way in which you may yet wriggle round the analysis."

Drury sat upright, hopeful but puzzled.

"Even," continued Sir James, "if my analysis is correct. I suppose you don't see what I mean?"

"No, sir; frankly I don't. Either your results are correct, in which case it knocks our work to bits, or they are wrong and our case still survives."

"In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand that would be so," agreed Sir James. "Put the problem before a scientist in general terms and he would not even allow you the thousandth chance, any more than I would have done a few minutes ago. But in this particular instance there is a possible fallacy which chemistry cannot detect. Nor should I have detected it if it had not been for your confounded persistency and confidence in your theory. If you had not stuck to it I should

simply have given my evidence dead against you, which shows how dangerous the expert witness may be when he is left to himself and works without a complete knowledge of the rest of the evidence. There is a loophole, Drury, but I can't help you to creep through it. I can only point out its existence and leave you to get evidence to prove it—if you can. And it will be a darned difficult thing to prove."

Sir James removed his pipe from his mouth, unscrewed the mouthpiece and began to clean its filthy interior with a screwed-up spill of Whatman's No. 9 filter paper.

"Assuming your theory to be correct," he went on, "this man is an inhumanly ingenious criminal, who has hit upon an almost undetectable method of murder. He has already fooled me once with it—still assuming that you are right—and he has now arranged things so that chemistry cannot help you even now, when you have told me what to look for."

"Ingenious! I should think he is. Every detail worked out to perfection."

"Quite so. Now I think it often happens that criminals take a lot of precautions. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. They often overdo it. The more precautions a man takes the more likely you are

to learn something about his mentality and method of working, so he is really giving you information all the time he thinks he is securing himself."

"Very well. We will suppose that this ingenious murderer, having hit upon his ideal poison, wants to make doubly sure of being undetected. If he is smart enough to think of insulin he is just the sort of person who would want to do that. He gives his insulin, knowing perfectly well that it can only be discovered after death by a blood sugar test. He doesn't expect this to happen for a moment, because of the originality of his method, but he decided to take precautions in case it is done. He knows that the only way we can detect it is by estimating its effect, which is a lowering of the normal percentage of sugar, so immediately after the death of his victim he injects sufficient sugar into his veins to bring it back to somewhere near the normal figure. This abolishes the one and only clue. He would have to be careful not to inject his sugar until death had actually taken place, or the corpse would come back to life again."

Drury nodded. The antidotal properties of sugar had been mentioned before.

"Go on, sir. Tell me all about it." Once

more Drury began to see a light in the obscurity of the tangle.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"H'm. That's a bit vague. However, we'll start with the kind of sugar."

"Is there more than one kind?"

"Yes, dozens. The sugar in the blood is not the sort of stuff you get at the grocer's, which is cane or beet sugar; it is glucose or grape sugar, which is quite a different chemical compound. It doesn't look like ordinary sugar and it doesn't taste as sweet. The cane sugar you eat in your food has to be converted into glucose by digestion before it gets into the blood. Now as regards quantity. I have been refreshing my memory on these matters since you last saw me, so I am a perfect mine of information to-day. The amount of blood in the average man is about five per cent of the body weight, which works out at about seven pounds in a man of ten stone. This contains one-tenth per cent of glucose, so the total amount of this sugar circulating in the blood is about—er——"

Sir James scribbled figures on a piece of scrap paper.

"Forty-nine grains or, say, a small teaspoonful. It is not much, but it represents the margin

between life and death. Symptoms due to lack of sugar come on, as a rule, when the amount has dropped from ten parts in ten thousand to eight, and unconsciousness takes place when it gets down to three and a half. The lowest figure ever recorded to be followed by recovery after treatment is two and a half, so we may be pretty certain that two would be fatal if not treated. That would mean forty grains of glucose to be injected to restore things to normal. I think that in this calculation we can disregard the reserve stores of glucose in other parts of the body, because the man would die before they could be called into play. I got all these figures from a book written by Toronto men, and Toronto is the birth-place of insulin, so they ought to be reliable.* It wouldn't be a very expensive business to cover up your tracks in this way, with glucose at five shillings a pound. It would cost—not quite a halfpenny."

"You can buy it, then?"

"Yes. Any wholesale druggists supply it. We use quite a lot of it in the laboratory. The only difficulty, as far as I can see, is to get it properly distributed."

"Distributed?"

* These figures may be verified by reference to "Insulin, its use in the treatment of diabetes," by J. J. R. Macleod and W. R. Campbell. (Williams and Watkins, Baltimore, 1925.)

"Well, you have to wait till the person is dead before you give it, or you revive him—that is, you have to wait till the blood has stopped circulating. But you want your glucose——"

"All this sounds very personal," put in Drury with a smile.

"He wants his glucose, then—does that suit you?—to be evenly distributed all over the body so that it will be present in every place where samples could possibly be taken. I think he could get over that by dissolving it in a fairly large quantity of water or saline solution before injecting it. That would carry it round to some extent, and its natural spreading powers would do the rest, in the same way that a lump of sugar will sweeten a whole cup of tea in time even if you don't stir it up. You understand, Drury, that, if this actually was done, no analysis of mine can help you. It is a very serious matter indeed for humanity, because it represents the nearest possible approach to an undetectable murder. For once in a way the criminal has got ahead of the toxicologist."

"Yes, I see that."

"On thinking it over like this I am quite converted to your theory. It is plain enough that my analysis, which appears at first to contradict your work, need not necessarily do so, if we

assume that your criminal has done what I have just described. I only wish there was a satisfactory test for insulin."

"The only chance, then, is for me to try and find other evidence?"

"Yes; and it will be a pretty difficult business to get hold of anything definite."

"It will. Of course I shall start by finding out whether he has bought any glucose recently. By the way, would he be likely to buy it secretly, sir?"

"I don't think so. It is absolutely innocuous stuff, as harmless as ordinary sugar. No, if he took no precautions about his books he certainly wouldn't about the glucose."

"In that case I shall go to his usual wholesale druggists first. Even if he has bought any I don't see that it takes us much further. The whole thing is so circumstantial that a smart counsel would knock it to pieces in a few minutes."

"It is your only chance," replied Sir James seriously as he disconnected his Bunsen burner and put it away in his bag, "and I hope to God you can do it. If this method gets known, Heaven help society. Medical evidence won't be the slightest use in murder cases and the Home Office Pathological Department will have to shut up shop."

He held out his hand to Drury, who had picked up his hat in readiness to go.

"I will say God be with ye on this occasion," he said, "rather than contract it down to the modern and meaningless good-bye."

CHAPTER XVII

THE OFFICE BOY'S REVENGE

A REFERENCE to the poison register which had been found in the Barhaven consulting-room showed that Dr. Laidlaw had been in the habit of purchasing the majority of his drugs from one firm. To Messrs. Barclay and Stevens therefore, wholesale manufacturing chemists and surgical instrument makers, Drury first turned his attention. He intended, if he drew blank there, to return to Barhaven and search the doctor's correspondence thoroughly in order to trace every firm with which the suspected man had had dealings.

The inquiry clerk at Barclay and Stevens' passed him on to an office boy, who delivered him to the chief assistant in the wholesale department, and so by slow degrees he was decanted into the office of the managing director.

"Good morning," said that gentleman in reply to his greeting. "What can we do for you?"

Drury laid his card on the desk.

"That is my name, Mr. Stevens, and I have come to see you about some transactions of yours with a Dr. Laidlaw of Barhaven."

The managing director scarcely glanced at the card, but stood twiddling it in his fingers with an air of embarrassment.

"Oh—er—yes," he said. "You've got on to it very quickly. We only discovered it ourselves yesterday, and I have already written to Dr. Laidlaw explaining and apologizing for the mistake. I hope you will allow our voluntary confession to mitigate the offence. It is really very annoying for a firm of our standing to be let down by an office boy changing the labels in the stock room as a revenge for being dismissed."

Drury was completely bewildered by this and said so. Mr. Stevens smoothed out his crumpled card and looked at it again, this time more carefully.

"Criminal Investigation Department," he read out slowly and tossed it on to the table. "Sit down, Mr. Drury. We have been talking at cross-purposes—at least I have. I saw the word 'inspector' and jumped to the conclusion that you were an inspector of food and drugs. As it happens a mistake has just been discovered which might quite easily have got us into trouble

with that department. Have one of these, will you?" and he pushed across a box of cigarettes.

Drury took one and prepared to listen to the rest of the story.

"As you know," continued Mr. Stevens, "the Food and Drugs Act says that we must supply commodities 'of the nature substance and quality demanded' under penalties for infringement. Dr. Laidlaw ordered some drugs from us a month or two ago and they were sent to him in the usual way. This was quite an ordinary occurrence—we are in the habit of getting orders from him every few weeks—and nothing more was heard about the matter until our stock-taking, when we found out that a mistake had been made and we had, in one instance, supplied the wrong stuff. Fortunately it was not an error likely to have serious consequences, but it is annoying all the same."

"Oh, well, that's nothing to do with me, Mr. Stevens. My job is to find out whether you have supplied Dr. Laidlaw with any glucose lately and, if so, how much and on what date."

"That's very funny. It was the glucose order which went wrong."

"Oh, indeed?"

"If you want to know about it you had better come through into the order office."

Drury followed Mr. Stevens out of his sanctum into a long room which echoed with the irritating clatter of typewriters. Down one side ran a glass partition with several booking office windows in it, through which could be seen shirt-sleeved men busy with bottles and packing-cases.

"Go and fetch Dr. Laidlaw's ledger," said the surgical instrument maker to the nearest typist. "Orders, mostly from doctors and retail chemists, are dealt with here and passed through to the packers in the warehouse," he continued as the girl hurried away on her errand. "Ours is a complicated business, you know. Apart from the actual making of things there is such an immense variety of stock that the mere fulfilment of an order may mean collecting articles from a dozen different rooms. Here's one example."

Mr. Stevens picked up a paper from the vacated desk.

"This is from a doctor ordering cotton-wool and bandages—those come from the top floor. He also wants six or seven different kinds of drugs—which come from the second floor—a cylinder of oxygen—basement—a pair of scissors, a chloroform mask and a packet of surgical needles—instrument department—sends back three scalpels for sharpening and a pair of

forceps for replating—those go to the workshop—wants to know what we mean by not crediting him for the last lot of returned empties and asks us to find him a locum for July—those come to me. Now you see why we need all those clerks."

The girl returned with a loose-leaf ledger, which she handed to her employer.

"Perhaps we'd better go back to my room?" he suggested.

Drury nodded his agreement. The noise of the typewriters and the presence of their operators were not conducive to privacy or ease of conversation.

"Now what do you want to know?" inquired Mr. Stevens as he shut the door behind them and flicked over the pages of the ledger.

"I would like to see Dr. Laidlaw's recent orders from you, please."

"Right. Here you are. This is the last one of all—folio 129—two pounds of sodium salicylate, a thousand aspirin tablets, two ounces of oil of peppermint, one pound of tincture of opium—otherwise known as laudanum. Signature all correct as required by the Dangerous Drugs Act—two gross of blue pill, one Winchester quart—that's half a gallon—of methylated spirit, two pounds of chloroform—he must be a Scotchman. Funny thing, all Scotch doctors use a lot of

chloroform and English ones won't look at it. They use ether instead—one dozen vaccination pads, six yards of gauze, two pound packets of boracic lint and one pound of glucose. Ordered by telephone February the 21st and despatched February the 22nd. Is that what you want ? "

" Yes," replied Drury, pricking up his ears at the mention of glucose. Sir James Martin's suggested loophole was open—but was it open wide enough ? Through it a glimpse of the tortuous mentality of the criminal could be seen, but there is a vast difference between conjecture and legal proof. Laidlaw had undoubtedly procured the chemical which was necessary for his analytical checkmate, but the position was so paradoxical that the use of the glucose in replacing a missing constituent itself destroyed all proof that it had been used. The whole chain of evidence was either circumstantial or presumptive, and for the life of him Drury could not decide whether his case was strong enough to put before a jury. He had an uneasy feeling that it was not.

" What was this mistake you mentioned ? " he inquired.

" Oh, that ? That was the glucose. Dr. Laidlaw never got it at all. No doubt he thought he did, but what he actually got was lævulose."

Drury experienced a sinking feeling in his interior. If Laidlaw had not had glucose in his possession he certainly could not have injected it into the body, and in that case it was impossible to challenge the result of the analysis.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE THIRD ANALYSIS

"WHAT is lævulose?" asked the inspector wearily, his invariable habit of making use of the expert coming to the rescue and filling a mental gap.

"It is another kind of sugar, very similar to glucose."

"Would Dr. Laidlaw notice the mistake?"

"No. They look very much alike, and they are very much alike. In fact, you can't tell the difference between them with the ordinary chemical tests. They have the same chemical formula, and the only way to distinguish them is by an optical test."

"Wait a minute. Let's go over that again. You say that it is not possible to tell them apart by looking at them?"

"That's right."

"Then Dr. Laidlaw would probably use this —this—what do you call it?"

"Lævulose."

"Instead of the glucose he had ordered without realizing that he had got hold of the wrong stuff?"

"Yes."

"And anybody testing for it when he had used it would think that it was glucose if he was expecting to find glucose?"

"He would, unless he used the polarimeter—that optical test I mentioned. If he used chemical tests only he would get the same results with either of the two sugars."

"Good," said Drury with grim satisfaction. "He could spot it with a polarimeter, though?"

"Yes, at once. If you asked a chemist to identify an unknown sugar for you he would use a polarimeter as a matter of course in order to distinguish between these two."

"I see. But if you simply asked him whether glucose was present or not in a place where lævulose never occurs, he wouldn't use it?"

"No. Chemical tests would be sufficient."

"Thanks very much, Mr. Stevens. All this must sound very mysterious to you, but I think you will understand it if you keep your eyes on the newspapers during the next few weeks."

Drury took his departure and hurried to the nearest post office, where he despatched a

telegram addressed to Martin, St. Martha's Hospital, London.

Postpone analysis important further information to hand coming first train

Four hours later the inspector was again in the private laboratory at the hospital, impatiently waiting for the arrival of the pathologist, who was occupied in the adjoining lecture theatre. Through the closed double doors of the latter, which were only a few yards away, Drury could hear the level monotone of his voice. The clock struck four, and a moment or two later the lecturer ceased speaking; there was the sound of the shutting of many note-books, the door opened and Sir James came out. As he crossed the corridor to his own room the second swing door burst open and a mighty clatter of feet arose as the students poured forth in a noisy stream.

The lecturer put down his notes and began to wash the chalk dust off his hands.

"I got your telegram, Drury," he began. "I couldn't make head or tail of it, but I followed your instructions blindly. What is it all about?"

"I didn't want you to waste any of those samples, sir," said Drury.

"Waste them? Are you implying that I am not capable of finding out the amount of glucose in them?"

"Yes, sir," was the surprising response, but the tone in which it was uttered robbed it of all impertinence.

"Out with it, man. Why can't I estimate the glucose?"

"Because there isn't any."

The pathologist frowned.

"May I ask how you account for the preliminary test being positive to the extent of nearly decimal one per cent?"

In a few words Drury enlightened him about the malicious but fortunate revenge of Messrs. Barclay and Stevens' late and unlamented office boy.

"What a chap you are for ferreting things out!" said Sir James admiringly. "I wonder if we are really on the right track at last? The sooner we know the better, I suppose."

He unlocked a cupboard and took out a cardboard box.

"These are the samples we took at the second exhumation," he said. "We shall have to take them upstairs to the chemical laboratory because I haven't got a polarimeter here, and, besides, it is rather out of my line and my opinion would

be scarcely worth having. It is lucky for us that this mistake was made," he continued as they climbed the stairs. "If Laidlaw had got what he ordered we could have proved nothing —you would have had to rely on presumptive evidence, and that doesn't always go down very well with the twelve good men and true."

"It is about time we had a bit of luck in this case, sir. Up to now it has been nothing but disappointments."

Sir James was economizing his breath for the ascent of the second flight of steps and made no reply.

Most of the different sections of a medical school have their own characteristic smell, and a person experienced in such matters can recognize any one of them blindfolded. The odour of dogfish which emanates from the department of zoology is quite unmistakably different from the spirituous aroma which arises from the curator's room of a pathological museum or the garage-like scent of xylol in the physiological laboratory. An acrid smell of chemicals heralded their approach to their destination as they toiled up the stairs and passed through the swing doors into the laboratory.

Sir James beckoned to an attendant who was

arranging demonstration apparatus on the large raised bench underneath the blackboard.

"Will you ask Professor Sheldon if I could have a word with him?"

"Certainly, sir."

The attendant hurried away on his errand, and presently a tall, white-coated man emerged from a door marked "Private" and came across the laboratory towards them.

"Here is the professor," said Sir James. "Good afternoon, Sheldon. Would you be so kind as to do a saccharimetry for us?"

"I would," responded the professor cheerfully. "Come into my room. Bring me Laurent's polarimeter," he added to the attendant.

Sir James barely had time to introduce Drury to the chemist before the man returned, carrying a complicated instrument which he deposited on the bench. He connected it to the nearest gas-tap by means of a piece of rubber tubing, placed a bottle of white powder beside it and retired.

"The glass tube is clean, sir," he said as he left the room.

"Right. Thank you."

The apparatus consisted of a metal stand with an eyepiece surrounded by a graduated dial at one end and a gas burner at the other. Between

the two was what appeared to be a telescope or microscope barrel and a horizontal glass tube about eight inches long, arranged in line with each other.

"Do you really know how to work this thing?" asked Sir James in accents of feigned admiration.

"We are not amused," replied the professor, but a half-smile in his eyes belied the solemnity of his face. "It has only one eyepiece, you see, so I have no difficulty in remembering which end is which. It is very rarely indeed that I find myself lighting the eyepiece and looking down the gas burner!"

"I ought to warn you," continued the pathologist, "that this is a medico-legal case, and the inspector here will drag you off to give evidence about it. I should like you to do it, though, because we want an authoritative opinion."

The professor nodded and cast a reflective eye upon the samples in Sir James's cardboard box.

"It must be a transparent solution," he observed.

"So it must. I had forgotten that. I'll go and clear one of them now." Sir James left the laboratory and went downstairs, leaving Drury to watch the professor preparing the apparatus.

"How does it work?" he inquired.

"Well, it is rather difficult to explain," re-

turned Mr. Sheldon, striking a match and lighting the gas jet, which burned with an almost invisible blue flame.

He opened a drawer and took out a small slab of some glittering substance.

"That is a piece of Iceland spar," he went on. "It looks much the same to you as any other crystal, I dare say, but put it down on a piece of paper and try to read through it."

Drury took the crystal and placed it on a page of his open notebook. It was almost glass-like in its transparency and the writing showed through it distinctly—but the writing was double. Every letter and every word was duplicated in a most confusing manner as though written with a double-nibbed pen.

"Try another experiment," suggested the professor, taking a pencil out of his pocket. "Here is a blank sheet of paper with a dot on it. Just one dot. There is no deception and nothing up my sleeve, gentlemen. Now put the crystal on it."

Drury did so and two dots instantly appeared.

"Turn the crystal," directed Mr. Sheldon, "and see what happens."

As the crystal rotated one of the dots remained stationary and the other revolved round it. Drury blinked and lifted it away from the paper.

There on the white surface was the innocent-looking pencil mark as motionless and well behaved as ever.

"Funny stuff, isn't it?" smiled Mr. Sheldon. "It has the property of splitting up light rays into two, which accounts for the double vision, and it is used in this instrument for sugar analysis."

The professor removed the stopper from the bottle of white powder on the bench and poured some of the contents into the apparatus at the gas burner end. The blue flame suddenly changed to yellow.

"We have to use a standard one-colour light for these experiments," he explained. "Common salt burning in the gas jet gives that yellow flame. The principle of the method is this, reduced to its simplest terms. Rays of our yellow light pass through one of these Iceland spar crystals and are split up into two. Solutions of sugars have the property of being able to rotate one of these rays. Different sugars rotate it in opposite directions—glucose turns it to the right and lævulose to the left, and, moreover, the amount of rotation enables us to calculate the percentage of sugar in the solution. The custom-house people use polarimeters—only they call them saccharimeters—for working out the duty on sugars of different strengths."

Sir James Martin re-entered the laboratory carrying a flask containing a colourless liquid.

"This is one of our samples," he said. "Don't look so worried, Drury. I haven't spoiled it. It has been boiled and filtered and chemically treated to remove all the colouring matter and other things which might interfere with the test, but the sugar in it is untouched."

He handed it over to Mr. Sheldon, who removed the glass tube from its place in the apparatus, rinsed it out with a little of the liquid in the flask and then filled it with the remainder.

"The tube has been carefully cleaned," he observed, "but in case any water is left in it, which would mix with and alter the strength of our specimen, we always rinse it out with some of the liquid to be tested."

He replaced it in its supports, adjusted the gas jet and went round to the eyepiece.

"Show Drury how to work it," suggested Sir James. "He's done most of the work in this case, so he ought to be in at the finish."

Mr. Sheldon stepped aside and motioned the inspector to take his place at the eyepiece. He then removed the glass tube again.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"Nothing, except a circle of light divided down the middle."

"Right. That's what you should see. Both halves of it are equally illuminated, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Now I put the tube of sugar solution back in its place. What happens?"

"One-half of the circle is darker than the other."

"That is because the sugar has rotated that ray I told you about. Now turn the dial to the right until the two halves are equal again——"

"To the left," interposed Sir James.

"Right," repeated Mr. Sheldon decidedly.

"Left," reiterated the pathologist.

The professor stared at him in amazement. "I thought you said it was a sample of blood——" he began.

"I did."

"Well, then, who on earth expects to find——?"

"We have to abandon all preconceived expectations here," replied the pathologist. "We know it is blood. We know blood contains glucose and therefore the dial should turn to the right, but we have to forget all we know and treat it in a purely scientific spirit—open minds and all that sort of thing. We have already crashed once or twice—at least I have—by

making assumptions which would ordinarily be justifiable, and it is only the labours of the inspector here—who I see is qualifying for a splitting headache by making observations with one eye shut—which put us back on to the straight and narrow path again. Keep both eyes open, man, keep both eyes open."

It is just as difficult for a beginner to use an optical instrument without screwing up his face and shutting the unused eye tightly as it is to place a monocle in position without opening the mouth, and Drury tried in vain to comply with Sir James's instructions.

"But you don't get lævulose in the human body," protested the single-minded Mr. Sheldon, not to be diverted from his point. "Not in any appreciable amount, at any rate."

"I know you don't. But you just watch that dial."

Slowly Drury's fumbling and inexperienced fingers turned the milled edge of the wheel. First to the right—but only a little way—then back again without hesitation past the zero point and to the left of it. Further and further it revolved, more and more slowly, until it finally stopped.

"I think the two halves are equally bright now."

"What did I tell you?" chuckled Sir James.

"I see you don't believe it. He's only a novice, so do it yourself. We want you to do it, anyway, because it is an extremely important decision."

"Is it? Have you discovered a new disease or something? I never heard of lævulose in the blood before."

"If you find lævulose present it means that a murder has been proved," Sir James answered gravely. "We'll let you into the secret afterwards."

Professor Sheldon took off his glasses and polished them carefully on his handkerchief.

"You don't say so?" he exclaimed. "I'd no idea it was such a serious business."

He turned the dial back to zero, sat down and applied his eye to the instrument. Sir James leaned forward, gripping the edge of the bench until his knuckles grew white, his eyes fixed on the dial, upon the movement of which two lives depended. Mr. Sheldon's practised fingers closed upon it and Drury turned away, unable to bear the strain of watching. One moment more would either justify him or deal him a crushing, and this time final, blow. He heard the stool pushed back and turned round to see the professor get up with a bewildered expression on his face.

The dial had moved to the left!

CHAPTER XIX

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

THE Southbourne Police Court had a very poor audience owing to the counter-attraction of the first mid-week football match of the season. There was a full complement of police and reporters, whose duty compelled them to attend, but the portion of the court reserved for the public was nearly empty.

The trial of Edward Derrington and his wife for burglary and false pretences took second place to the performances of Southbourne United against Sheffield Wednesday, because the Levinsky case was almost forgotten. From front page head-lines it had gradually degenerated into occasional back page paragraphs, and the general impression was that the police had given it up as hopeless. Accordingly the populace departed in their thousands to watch the critical match which was to decide whether the team of highly paid Scotsmen conventionally supposed

to represent this English town was fit to bear its banner during the forthcoming season, or whether one or two new Irishmen should be purchased to stiffen the forward line.

The prisoners came up the steps into the dock, attended by prison officers, shortly after the magistrates had taken their seats on the bench. A tall, dark-haired man immediately rose and addressed the bench, and at his first words the few spectators in the gallery sat up with eyes like hatpegs.

"Your Worship, I appear for the Director of Public Prosecutions, and I am instructed to inform you that both these prisoners were charged this morning by Inspector Drury with the wilful murder of Israel Levinsky, of Croft Villa, on the night of the 27th–28th April at Holm Lea, Southbourne."

Half an hour later, by some occult process, the news had been broadcast through the town. Every available inch in court was filled and hundreds were standing outside. Conspicuous among these was Mr. James Tomlin, now free from supervision, cursing freely because he was unable to get in.

The interest never lapsed again. Right up to the last it continued, and the crowds that assembled outside the gates of two prisons at

eight o'clock one autumn morning seven weeks later were so large that the warders could scarcely get to the boards to pin up the final notices.

THE END

RECENT MYSTERY STORIES

(7s. 6d. net each)

THE POISONED GLASS

By S. J. STUTLEY and A. E. COPP

Second Impression

"An amazing mixture of Edgars Poe and Wallace, with a touch of Conan Doyle and Gaboriau . . . a story that grips one by the sheer generosity of its horror, the character of Detective Chittock is drawn with considerable skill."—*Evening Standard.*

THE HOUNDS OF JUSTICE

By ROBIN FORSYTHE

"A story which was baffling enough to drag a hardened reader of thrillers through to the end."—*Evening News.*

"Mr. Forsythe writes extremely well, and has a knack of surprising characterization."—*Morning Post.*

THE DECKER

By W. GRAEME-HOLDER

A mystery story by a new writer, set in a New Zealand background throughout. It is full of dramatic and exciting situations.

MURDER IN EARL'S COURT

By NEIL GORDON

"An excellent crime tale. . . . It is a lively story, told with pace, energy, dramatic intensity, and a sardonic sense of humour."—*Sunday Express.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

THE BODLEY HEAD MYSTERIES

A new series of copyright mystery novels by well-known writers, printed in large readable type and bound in strong cloth with a distinctive wrapper.

Crown 8vo. 2s. 6d. each volume

VOLUMES PUBLISHED AND IN PREPARATION:

THE SECRET OF CHIMNEYS	By Agatha Christie
THE MAN IN THE DARK	By John Ferguson
THE CROW'S INN TRAGEDY	By Annie Haynes
THE PHANTOM PASSENGER	By Mansfield Scott
THE MAN IN THE BROWN SUIT	By Agatha Christie
THE SECRET ROAD	By John Ferguson
THE ABBEY COURT MURDER	By Annie Haynes
THE GUILTY HOUSE	By Charles Kingston
PAYMENT DEFERRED	By C. S. Forester
THE BLACK CIRCLE	By Mansfield Scott
THE THRESHOLD OF FEAR	By Arthur J. Rees
THE HIGHGATE MYSTERY	By Charles Kingston
THE SECRET OF GREYLANDS	By Annie Haynes
THE CRIME AT TATTENHAM CORNER	By Annie Haynes
MURDER ON THE MARSH	By John Ferguson
NIGHT OF PERIL	By Horace Bleackley
THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD	By Charles J. Dutton
MISSING OR MURDERED	By Robin Forsythe
CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE	By Andrew Stewart
FROM DUSK TILL DAWN	By William Garrett

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

BOOKS BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. net

THE SECRET ADVERSARY
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. net

THE MURDER ON THE LINKS
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. net

POIROT INVESTIGATES
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. net

THE SECRET OF CHIMNEYS
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. 6d. net

THE MAN IN THE BROWN SUIT
7s. 6d. net, 3s. 6d. net and 2s. 6d. net

ALSO

THE AGATHA CHRISTIE OMNIBUS
3 novels in one. 900 pp. 7s. 6d. net

"Mrs. Christie must be reckoned in the first rank of the detective story writers."—*Observer*.

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

BOOKS BY ARTHUR J. REES

THE BRINK

7s. 6d. net

" A tale of love and madness, well managed and well-written . . . the tragic close is an effective climax."—*Morning Post.*

THE PAVILION BY THE LAKE

7s. 6d. net

" An ably-invented and ingeniously-handled plot of murder and mystery—the narrative is always engrossing. It cannot but confirm and further extend this author's already wide popularity."—*Scotsman.*

CUP OF SILENCE

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTH DOWNS

7s. 6d. net

" An exciting story of the romance of the lost heir of a noble house. There are some excellent pictures of the South Downs, which the author describes with evident knowledge and loving care."—*Evening Standard.*

ISLAND OF DESTINY

7s. 6d. net

" A first-class story, well written, and with just a hint of something mysterious and intriguing in its pages which lures the reader on until the end."—*Daily Chronicle.*

THE HAND IN THE DARK

7s. 6d. net and 3s. 6d. net

" Mr. Rees spins us with deft entanglements another of his first-class mystery yarns. . . . An ingenious *dénouement.*"—*Times Literary Supplement.*

MOON ROCK

7s. 6d. net and 3s. 6d. net

" It is one of the best murder stories we have read for a long time."—*Daily Chronicle.*

THE SHRIEKING PIT

7s. net and 3s. 6d. net

" A capital entertainment."—*Punch.*
" A first-rate detective story."—*Truth.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

BOOKS BY JOHN FERGUSON

THE SECRET ROAD

7s. 6d. net and 2s. 6d. net

" A first-class yarn."—*Times Literary Supplement.*
" Capital sensation and unusually good writing."—*Morning Post.*
" An ingenious sensational romance of mystery and adventure in India. His hand has lost none of its cunning."—*Bookman.*

STEALTHY TERROR

7s. net and 3s. 6d. net

" It speaks volumes for the author's ingenuity and resourcefulness that there is no putting down the book until the last page is reached, and even then one puts it down reluctantly, envying the next reader."—*Bookman.*
" One of the best thrillers we have read for a long time—a super-thriller."—*Daily Graphic.*
" A breathless and ingenious narrative."—*Westminster Gazette.*
" Really quite a remarkable spy story."—*Queen.*
" The reader who takes this up will not lay it down till it is finished."—*Saturday Review.*

THE DARK GERALDINE

7s. 6d. net

" There are moments of breathless drama in 'The Dark Geraldine.' "—*Observer.*
" Here is enough mystery, danger and excitement to satisfy anyone. Mr. Ferguson's literary style is excellent and he contrives to develop character. This is a first-rate yarn."—*Punch.*
" Here is a really well-done mystery story."—*Graphic.*
" A first-rate piece of story-telling."—*Westminster Gazette.*
" A most exciting mystery story."—*Spectator.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

BOOKS BY JOHN FERGUSON

THE MAN IN THE DARK

7s. 6d. net

Also in The Bodley Head Mysteries, 2s. 6d. net

"This is one of the very best detective yarns of recent years. It is credibly planned and its construction is little short of perfect. What a joy it is to encounter a 'thriller' by a man who can write!"—*John o' London's Weekly.*

"A novel I started late in the evening and lost my night's sleep over, because I did not know it was time to get up till I had finished. That is the sort of book this is, and, unless you are for something soporific, I advise you to get it."—*Bookman.*

"An uncommonly well-told murder tale. Mr. Ferguson has all the devices of discreet sensationalism at his finger-tips; but he also has the infinitely more interesting capacity of bringing us face to face with human beings who refuse to fade out of the memory the moment they have ceased to be useful as cogs in a complicated mechanism."—*Daily Telegraph.*

"A first-class example of this author's particular manner. It has all the cruder essentials of a popular mystery, with finer ones of characterization and writing so rarely mixed with them."
—*Morning Post.*

MURDER ON THE MARSH

In The Bodley Head Mysteries, 2s. 6d. net

"Nothing more intriguing has appeared for a long time. It is quite out of the usual run of detective stories and is written in beautiful English and with that care for detail common to all Mr. Ferguson's productions. . . . Certainly the best thing which has appeared from his pen."—*Scots. Observer.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD., VIGO ST., W.1

VEF · Sy 483 · m
Sykes. The
missing money-
lender.

VEF
.Sy 483
.m

LIBRARY OF THE BOSTON ATHENAEUM
VEF .Sy483 .m cutter
Sykes, W. Stanley/The missing money-lend
3 1807 00104 8579